

# THE ARGOSY.

AUGUST, 1884.

## THE WHITE WITCH.

### CHAPTER XXII.

#### DICK'S WOUNDS.

THREE o'clock was chiming forth from the various clocks of Croxham Abbey in the early morning, as Godfrey Mayne left his step-mother's room with his father, followed by Lydia. The maid swiftly disappeared. Godfrey dutifully accompanied Mr. Mayne to the door of his new quarters, the Swallow chamber, wished him good-night, and then went back along the cross passage, deep in thought.

He knew that some audacious intruder must have got into the Abbey and penetrated to Mrs. Mayne's room: a strong impression lay upon him that the man had not yet effected his escape, but was concealing himself somewhere or other. Was it Dick Wilding? Godfrey did not know. If it was, Mr. Dick should be treated to the soundest castigation he had ever yet experienced—and his migrations effectually stopped for the future. But it might not be Dick; Godfrey hardly thought it was: and he would never have thought of him at all in such a matter but for Dick's escapade of the previous night.

When he got into the main corridor, he walked noisily to the door of his chamber at the end of it, and shut it with a bang—but without going in. As he had on his dancing boots, he could tread pretty lightly; however, he took them off; and as he did so it occurred to him that the very same precaution might have been taken by the midnight visitor outside the door of the refectory. Godfrey was about to see if he could find traces of this man, but he wanted to do it noiselessly, lest the household should hear him and fall into another fright.

As he came to the door of his stepmother's room, he saw it was not quite closed. Lydia, who had been the last to pass out, might have left it so. Mary and her mother were talking in whispers, and Godfrey absolutely thought he heard also the tones of a man's voice. Suddenly Mrs. Mayne's was somewhat raised, so that Godfrey distinguished her words, piteous, quavering, pleading:

"Oh! Mary, for my sake!—you promised."

Whether Godfrey made any movement and it was heard, he knew not, but a hand was laid upon the handle of the door; and so swiftly that he had only time to put his back against the wall at the side and hold his breath. The door was pulled open for a moment, and some one looked out; then it was closed and locked, and Godfrey could catch no further sound. He almost felt that he was growing old with suspense. It did not last long, however. The dressing-room door, further on, was heard to open, and Mary's voice called softly in the darkness:

"Mr. Godfrey, are you there?"

He was beside her in an instant.

"I am sure you will want an explanation of all this."

"Yes, but not from you," said he gently.

"From whom then?" she asked, in trembling words.

"You know better than I—at present."

"But if I ask you not to—not to try to find out what is amiss?"

"I must serve you against your will, in my own way."

"Will you step inside just for a moment? Mamma——"

Quick as thought he turned, as a slight sound behind him fell on his ear while she was speaking. He could see nothing, but he rushed down the gallery, in pursuit of what he thought was a running footfall. That the midnight intruder was in advance of him, endeavouring to effect his escape, Godfrey felt sure of. There was a stumble over something; and then the faint light coming through the window at the end of the corridor showed Godfrey indistinctly the figure of the man. Where was he going? He dashed into the last room, the old school-room, slammed the door and turned the key. Godfrey hurled himself against the panels, but after the first shock he paused, arrested by a noise inside. It was the smash of glass, a window being broken, battered in. Then a sound of scrambling through and a fainter crash of glass outside.

At the same moment Godfrey forced the door in, flew to the shattered window and looked out. But there was no further sound, and there was no one to be seen. Some panes of the greenhouse roof below him were broken, and the lower part of the window through which he was looking was a wreck. The reason for this last wholesale destruction lay in the fact that he had put in that strong nail to secure the window the night before.

"One clue I shall have," thought Godfrey as he looked out: "The beggar must have cut himself to mincemeat. By Jove!"—as he examined more closely the hole in the greenhouse roof—"if he really did take his boots off I may look out for a man without any feet."

He went to his room; though not to bed. The danger, still only half known, which hung over Mary, which the night's events seemed to be drawing nearer, kept him feverishly wakeful: it was morning already, and he thought it might be as well if he sat up. Sir William

Hunt had not recognised Mary : it must then be indeed Mrs. Mayne who had reason to avoid him ; but Mary might be intending to sacrifice herself in the cause of her mother.

One especial question kept pressing itself upon Godfrey : could this midnight invader have been the detective?—come in to search in secret for some proof or other of the former crime ; or else boldly to confront Mrs. Mayne and extort confession from her ?

When dawn had broken, Godfrey, who was still intensely restless, went into one of the rooms that overlooked the farm, and was just in time to see Dick Wilding get over the wall, and begin searching the flower-bed underneath the refectory windows. Dick had his head bandaged up and one arm in a sling.

Godfrey's first impulse was to go down stairs and waylay him ; but he changed his mind and watched. After carefully turning over the leaves of the nasturtiums Dick tried to open the window. Failing in that, Godfrey himself having made it secure, the lad turned and followed the course of black footmarks which Godfrey could see from where he stood : they were right through a geranium bed, about the window, and the gravel-path coming from the direction of the meadow. The ground was damp yet ; and Godfrey supposed that the midnight intruder must have slipped, or otherwise brought his hands in contact with the earth, to account for the marks on the counterpane. Dick was evidently searching for something. He followed the footsteps carefully and minutely, until he disappeared from sight round a corner.

Then Godfrey ran lightly downstairs, unbolted the door and went in pursuit. Dick was continuing his search across the meadow towards the avenue. As soon as he caught sight of Godfrey coming down upon him with a face like a thunder-cloud, he fled like the wind, reached the avenue, crossed it, jumped, rolled, slid down the wooded hill on the other side, and was lost among the brambles and bracken. Godfrey knew better than to try to follow him.

"All right, my lad ; I'll have you presently," he called out to the still shaking bushes ; and then he turned back, wondering what it was the imbecile had been in search of, and how he could run like that with his feet cut to pieces, as they must have been last night. But how was it, if Dick had been the intruder, that he, with his cat-like carefulness and intimate knowledge of the place, had been so clumsy as to walk through a flower-bed.

When Godfrey returned indoors, the household was astir. He went in through the refectory and up the back stairs three at a time, anxious not to be seen, and almost fell against Mary : who gave a low cry at sight of him. She was going from her mother's to her own room, in her dressing-gown ; but instead of hurrying past Godfrey, she stopped short and stared at him blankly. His fair hair lay lank and disordered, his pale face and the dark rims round his eyes showed traces of a troubled night.

"Where have you been?" said she, falteringly.

"Oh, I've been making a night of it," answered Godfrey grimly. "I look as if I had been enjoying myself, don't I?"

But there was anxiety in her eyes—not for him. "You ran away very suddenly from me at mamma's dressing-room door last night, Mr. Godfrey. As if—as if you had seen a ghost too."

"So I did. Just step with me to the school-room and I will show you what the ghost has done."

She followed him into the school-room, without a word.

"Did you catch him?" she asked, turning to him suddenly, after they had both looked for a few moments at the shattered window.

At that moment the housemaid came in with a broom and duster. It was Friday, the day she generally cleaned the school-room.

"Why, Master Godfrey!" she cried in astonishment. Then the broken window caught her eye. "Oh, my!" she exclaimed, lifting her hands in dismay. The consternation of the past night's doings had spread to the entire household through Lydia; and the girl stared at the ruins with the others until light came into her face. "Then that's how he did it, miss!" she said.

"Who? What do you mean?" returned Mary.

"Dick Wilding, miss. We guessed it was he who had got in and caused the alarm; just now he passed the kitchen window with his head bound up. My! what a crash he must have made!"

"Listen, Emily," interposed Miss Dixon: "None of you must tease the poor lad about it: he is not as you are, remember. He frightened us, but he has done more harm to himself than to anybody. Mr. Godfrey"—turning to him—"I must beg of you also not to punish poor Dick."

"Don't be alarmed. I shall certainly not try to punish—poor Dick," replied Godfrey looking at her intently. He left the room as he spoke and went back to his own.

"I do believe Mr. Godfrey's going off his head," observed Emily to Lydia in the course of the morning. "I've thought him rather queer several times lately, and the fright last night must have finished him. I found a pair of boots, all over mud, in the back-stair closet, poked behind the brooms and brushes; first I thought they were master's, but he said no, so then I took them to Mr. Godfrey. He angrily said they were not his, they must belong to one of the gardeners: but when I said where I found them, he clutched at 'em like mad, and told me to leave them with him."

"He wants to confront that stupid Dick with 'em," remarked Lydia.

Godfrey went round to the farm when breakfast was over. Nancy met him at the door, looking troubled and ashamed.

"Oh, Master Godfrey! I don't know how to face you, sir," said she, almost with tears in her eyes. "I told you Dick had been breaking away from me lately; but I never thought he would go these lengths; I did not indeed."



"Dick?" repeated Godfrey gently. "It was Dick?"

"Why yes, sir, of course it was. He will have to be sent away somewhere now: and it will just break my heart."

"Well, then, you may keep your heart whole, Nancy," he answered, "poor Dick shall not be sent away."

Nancy looked at him, to read his countenance, hardly believing. "Do you mean that, sir?"

"Yes, Nancy; or I should not say it."

The young woman's face lighted up. "Well, you are good-hearted, Master Godfrey! I could kiss you for that."

"You may if you like, Nancy. If I kissed you when you were a young damsel, you used to give me a swinging box on the ears for it, I remember."

Nancy laughed, but did not respond to the permission. She enquired what it was that her poor brother had really done, having heard different versions of it from the servants.

"The intruder must have got in through one of the refectory windows and then crept upstairs," said Godfrey. "When he wanted to get out again, he tried the school-room window, broke through it, fell on the greenhouse roof, and crashed it in."

"That's the part of the story that puzzles me most, sir: Dick isn't clumsy: like most half-witted folk, he is light and careful as a cat. Of course my father will send to have the repairs done, sir."

"Nonsense, he will do nothing of the kind," returned Godfrey peremptorily. "What does Dick say for himself?"

"First of all, he declared he did not do it. Then he turned sullen and wouldn't say anything more."

"He came to you to have his head bound up, I suppose?"

"No; Dick won't let me touch him. In the night; that is, early this morning—it could not have been very long after you called me to the window, sir—I heard somebody stumbling and limping along the passage. Dick, I supposed, and he seemed to be making for Mr. Cattermole's room. I called out to know what he could want, daring to wake up a gentleman at that time of night. But he took no notice, and when I opened my door Mr. Cattermole had let him in."

"You did not see him, then?"

"The first I saw of him was at breakfast, with his head and arm bound up. We had heard the story then, and didn't father give it to the poor lad! I know he deserved it; but ——"

"Did nobody take his part?"

"Nobody but Mr. Cattermole. He opened the door while father was talking and threatening, and pulled Dick away and sheltered him in his parlour. It was he who had dressed Dick's wounds. Dick must have been going to his room in the night for consolation. He worships Mr. Cattermole, who is really very kind to him, just as he does Miss Dixon."

"Where is Dick now?"

"Mr. Cattermole has taken him for a drive in the gig, and the boy went off as happy as if he had done something to be proud of! I shall let Mr. Cattermole have a piece of my mind about that; it is not right to pet and encourage Dick when he has been doing wrong."

"When he has been doing wrong, no," pointedly observed Godfrey.

Nancy, keen of insight, noted the tone. "Do you mean anything, sir, in saying that?" she asked.

"I mean—that is, I am thinking a great many things, Nancy," he answered. "Things that puzzle me."

"Can I help you, sir? I will if I can."

"Will you," rejoined Godfrey: and on the spur of the moment he made up his mind to play a bold stroke. "You must recollect, Nancy, mentioning to me that you saw your lodger making, as you believed, a likeness of Miss Dixon. Have you any reason to suspect that he—that he"—Godfrey hardly knew how to word it—"has ever had any acquaintance with Miss Dixon; or that he has come here with any special purpose connected with her?"

Nancy did not reply.

"Come," said Godfrey, "I see you know something. What is it?"

"I have only known it since yesterday," she replied in a low tone.

"As to telling it—it is not my secret, Mr. Godfrey."

Godfrey bent his head, and said, without giving any particulars, that he had reason to believe Miss Dixon had enemies, and that they were menacing her with what might be fraught with irredeemable danger. He and Nancy were both standing at the entrance gate; a good position, since they could see on all sides of them, yet could not be overheard.

"You have known me all my life, Nancy; you should know, I think, that I am to be trusted, and can be prudent. Can you hesitate?"

"You'll not betray me if I tell you, Mr. Godfrey? Or let—let harm come of it?"

"No, no; rely upon me."

"Then Mr. Cattermole is Miss Dixon's cousin."

"I thought so!" returned Godfrey, drily. "And pray, Nancy, how came he to confide the secret to you?"

"Well, he had been wanting me, more than once, to take a note from him in secret to Miss Dixon. But I had never consented: except the one that I gave to you, sir, with the broken bracelet. Yesterday afternoon, he called me into his parlour, and said he had great need to get a letter conveyed to her before she went off to the ball at Colonel Underwood's—which we had all been talking of—and he begged of me to take it to the Abbey. I refused; I told him I had never been a help in anything clandestine, and I never would be. Upon that he said he must entrust me with his secret, but I must be cautious not to repeat it. Miss Dixon was his cousin, he said, and Mrs. Mayne his aunt."

"I wonder he did not add that I was his brother!" retorted Godfrey, his lip curling with scorn.

"You don't believe it, Master Godfrey?"

"I certainly do not. Look here, Nancy—if he were thus related to them, why does he not come openly to the Abbey to see them; instead of sneaking about the place incog. pretending to be an artist?"

"I suppose he is really an artist," replied Nancy. "But, Mr. Godfrey, I think there must be some truth in it. I took the letter to the Abbey, and Emily carried it in to Miss Dixon. In less than half an hour an answer to it came back here in Miss Dixon's handwriting. He told me he had his reasons for keeping himself in the back-ground down here, and that Mrs. Mayne and her daughter knew what the reasons were."

"I wonder," thought Godfrey, "whether they do know it yet—the real truth: that he is a detective from Scotland Yard, come down for the purpose of watching them?" One aspect of the case now puzzled him—the motive for wishing to communicate privately with Miss Dixon. Could the man be wishing to save her from the punishment that was threatening to overtake her mother, and would make terms with her?

"Nancy," he said with a sigh, "there are many complications surrounding this matter, and I cannot explain them to you. You must be very cautious—and so must I, or we might do incalculable harm. You must say nothing, and do nothing, and appear to know nothing. One thing I will mention to you; I suspect it was not Dick who got into the Abbey last night, and I don't believe the lad has a cut or bruise about him."

"That the bandages and sticking-plaster are all sham!" exclaimed Nancy, aghast.

"Put, at any rate, upon sham places."

"My goodness! Then, Mr. Godfrey, who or what is it that you do suspect?"

"I cannot tell you, Nancy; I say there are complications. And I am not sure. Keep strictly my confidence, as I will keep yours—and continue to believe in Dick's damages. Good morning."

Godfrey knew perfectly well how much Nancy's whispered news was worth, but he resolved to test it. At luncheon, he referred incidentally to some pretty bangles of Mary's: "Those, I mean, that your brother brought you from India," he added.

"Why I never had a brother," she said, looking at him in surprise.

"Ah no. Your cousin—was it?"

"And I never had a cousin, either," she said, laughing and unsuspicious. "You must have misunderstood me in some way, Mr. Godfrey. I bought these bangles in London."

Godfrey accepted the correction, but he felt sick with alarm at what might be threatening her, and began to revolve all sorts of plans of action for her defence.

Early in the afternoon he went over to the Vicarage, where he found the girls cross and languid after the previous night's excitement. It was Mary who had reminded him that he ought to call; and, remembering his promise to the Vicar, he had snatched up his hat and started. But to the very door he was thinking of Dick Wilding and the detective, and wondering whether the latter was to be bought off with money; and he all but called Mrs. Thornhill "Nancy." He dared not let his thoughts dwell upon Mary herself; although the yoke of his engagement was now loosed from off his neck, to be taken up or not at the end of a month, he felt bound in honour to consider it only temporarily lifted. As Mary was not in any case to be his, he must fight down that passion which would spring up into such fierce life just when he thought he had got it under; and the best distraction he found was in devising plans to save her. He would use the month's respite in assuring, if it were possible, her security and happiness; and by that time he felt that, at the rate at which he was living now, he should have used up every strong emotion of which he was capable, and could enter matrimony safely and glad of rest.

Elspeth knew of the Vicar's decision and was rather tearful about it. It was better to be engaged to a man who admired Miss Dixon than not to be engaged at all. She supposed she must give him back her ring. This was to Elspeth the worst blow of all.

But of course he would not hear of that; and as she looked relieved, he promised that at the end of the month he would give her a bracelet.

"If we keep on our engagement?" said she, her eyes sparkling.

"Even if you decide to throw me over, I shall beg you to accept it as a sign that you bear me no ill-will."

"But mamma wouldn't let me if I were not engaged to you."

"Then you will have to be constant, whether you like it or not."

"Oh, it is not I who will be inconstant," said she naively. "There is nobody nice up there where we are going to—at least at this time of the year."

Godfrey laughed. "I shall then feel more sure of your devotion," he said lightly, but rather drily.

Perhaps when she was his wife he would be able to strike some speck of fire out of the unstirred nature, but just now her shallowness from irritating began to disgust him.

"And I could give a woman a love worth having!" he thought to himself, in sadness.

But he had done so already—and to the wrong woman. This often happens.

On his return home, he found Mary and his father on the point of starting to call at Goule Park. It had been announced that Lady Hunt was about to leave for town shortly; so as Mrs. Mayne still kept her room, the call must be made without her. Godfrey jumped

into the carriage too. All intercourse with Sir William was now interesting to him.

"Have you your detective down yet?" he said to the baronet, during the visit, when they were standing for a few moments apart.

"Yes," replied Sir William. "Curious to say, he came after me to Underwood's last night. Nothing has been done as yet: but he has the clue, he has the clue; and when his plans are matured, he will act."

"Act?" repeated Godfrey, vaguely.

"Pounce upon his prey," explained the baronet.

"What is the clue you speak of, Sir William?"

"The first clue," answered Sir William, after a minute's hesitation, "I got in a shop at Cheston. I think I have already told you of it. I saw there a face which I knew to be that of a woman who if not the actual murderer of my son, was an accomplice in the murder. It was she who helped the actual murderer to escape. When I saw the face, I seemed for a moment to lose the sight of my eyes. The shop was full of people, and when I recovered—it was only a few seconds—she was gone. A few days later I heard her voice in Croxham Church, as you know, Godfrey, or a voice so miraculously like hers that I thought I could not be mistaken! That was the second clue. Taken in conjunction with that meeting in the shop, it is a proof indisputable that at least one of the guilty parties is in this neighbourhood; and the detective officer thinks so too."

"You have related all this to him then?" spoke Godfrey.

"I related it to him last night at Underwood's; we walked about together in the garden. He was to have called on me here this morning, but I have had a note from him, saying he is busy at work, and for reasons which he will give me later, he thinks it best not to appear here for a day or two."

"May I ask what his name is, sir?"

"I cannot tell it you, Godfrey," said Sir William quickly. "Of course I know it myself; but he warned me not to repeat it to others, and not to speak of him at all in any way. You are partly in my confidence, you know, but I have not talked to anybody else."

"But, Sir William," resumed Godfrey after a pause, "surely you would not track a defenceless woman down, merely for helping the real criminal—perhaps it was a dear friend, or even relative—to escape?"

"I would hunt down the fiends who plotted to kill my boy, and laughed and sang before he had been laid in his grave, were they men or women."

"But—supposing you were to find out that one of the people suspected had generously incurred the blame of guilt in order to shield another, what then?" said Godfrey, keeping as cool as he could.

"I should say it was very improbable," said Sir William, drily.

Mr. Mayne drew near them, which put an end to the conversation. Godfrey fell into a fit of musing. What could have caused the



strange confusion the baronet seemed to have made between mother and daughter? Which of the two was really implicated, and in what way? Was Mary trying to take upon herself her mother's act, or bearing the consequences of her own? And which of their faces was it that he saw in the shop?

Godfrey was silent on the way back and at dinner. Afterwards, Mr. Mayne went up to his wife, and his son looked wistfully at Mary as she was following. She turned back towards the drawing-room and, opening the piano, sang two or three songs softly, so that her voice should not be heard elsewhere.

"Thank you, I should not have dared to ask you for such a pleasure," said Godfrey, holding himself well under control. He had taken the precaution to shut the windows, lest any ears outside should catch a note of that treacherous voice. She had now risen from the piano and was gazing with a dull stare of hopelessness out of one of the windows towards the meadow.

"We had better not talk about—what would make us both uncomfortable and unhappy," said she in a low voice. "But I must just say this to you: I heard what you said to Sir William to-day and—and I wanted to show you that I thanked you."

"How could you have heard it?" he exclaimed impulsively, in his surprise.

"I had followed to the bay-window where you were both standing—Lady Hunt was engaged with those other callers and Mr. Mayne—and I waited behind that great bunch of side curtains; they quite shielded me from view."

Godfrey said nothing more; he did not look at her. If he had spoken, if he had looked, the "selfish infatuation" with which she had reproached him would have burst all bounds. He turned away, trying to hum the air of the song she had just sung, but not doing it justice. When he did dare to let his eyes steal again towards her, the sight of her pale, sad face as she took up her work pierced him to the heart. He mustn't comfort her; he couldn't comfort her: *he* had no right to do that.

Why was not Ernest Underwood here, he was generous enough to go on to think. What was the fellow made of, to let a whole day pass—and the day after she had promised to be his wife—without coming near her, when he, Godfrey, would have died for the privilege of spending his time at her feet? If he stayed here much longer he felt that he should have to tell her so, and should get reproved for it; so he made a pretext to leave the drawing-room. As he went outside, he saw a figure approaching the house, and made it out through the gathering twilight to be that of Ernest. Godfrey tapped at the window, and she rose and opened it. He seized one of her hands in great excitement, and pressed it tenderly, with misty, shining eyes.

"You will be all right now, Mary. He is coming up the avenue

and he—he'll comfort you," concluded Godfrey : and went away before she could speak.

Godfrey had an errand to perform. After taking council with himself, he had come to the determination of seeking an interview with that powerful and dangerous man (as Godfrey regarded him) whose quarters were close by. Even detective officers were not always superior to bribes ; perhaps this one would not be.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### WITH THE DETECTIVE OFFICER.

PASSING through the lane on his way to the farm, Godfrey came upon Dick Wilding, who was sitting on a heap of stones, injudiciously employed in peeling the plaster off his face and pulling off his bandages. When he caught sight of Godfrey he jumped up and disappeared through a gap in the hedge with a yell. The farm-house door was open and there were sounds of voices in the big sitting-room to the right. The flickering glow of firelight shone through the windows ; and in the lodger's parlour there was the steady light of a lamp. Nancy saw Godfrey coming, and met him at the door.

"Is Mr. Cattermole in?" said he, softly.

"Yes, sir. He is writing his letters."

"Will you ask if he can see a messenger from his *cousin*?"

Nancy stared. "I—I don't understand."

"No, no ; women are not expected to. Do as you're told, Nancy."

She went into the parlour, and exchanged a few words with the occupant in a low voice. Then Godfrey heard a voice which made him start, prepared though he was. It was undoubtedly that of the man whom he had heard talking with Sir William.

"Take away the lamp, Nancy," he was saying. "I have finished writing, and the light hurts my eyes."

"If that be to keep up the delusion that you are a simple-minded artist, my friend, you are taking unnecessary pains," thought Godfrey.

Nancy came out and showed him in. The room was almost dark.

"I hope you don't mind this semi-obscurity, sir," said the man, rising and offering Godfrey a chair. "I suffer from weak eyes—a bad thing for an artist—I have the honour of speaking, I believe, to Mr. Godfrey Mayne."

"You do not let the weak sight check your ability in your other profession, however," observed Godfrey civilly. The man said nothing ; he did not start, but Godfrey thought he was surprised. "I have reason to know that you are a detective, brought down here by Sir William Hunt. I know the business you are here upon : and I know that you are a man of experience and of distinguished ability."

Mr. Cattermole laughed lightly. "Really, sir, you do me too

much honour. I fear you are quite mistaken. Is it because I am so very poor an artist that you have felt compelled to find another, and, I should think, more difficult profession for me?" said he, as if much amused.

Godfrey felt that he must make a bold stroke at once.

"Well, I apologise for my mistake," said he rising. "I can only say that, knowing the cleverest detective from Scotland Yard was down here, I wanted his advice in the matter of investing a little money—perhaps five hundred pounds, perhaps more, perhaps twice that sum. And a very clever little trick which was practised at the Abbey last night by some person staying here at the farm, made me jump rashly to the conclusion that you, Mr. Cattermole, were the very man I wanted."

"And you thought you could bribe the detective," observed the officer drily, after a pause.

"Oh, dear, no," disclaimed Godfrey. "But in the discharge of a detective's duty, it may sometimes happen that a little delicate consideration on his part may spare people—never actually concerned in the case, but who may have been drawn into it unwittingly—great pain; and of course the relatives and friends of those people cannot do enough to show their gratitude."

Godfrey was standing, with his hand busy among the china ornaments on the mantel-piece. He could not see Mr. Cattermole's face, as that gentleman was sitting with his back to the very little light that came from the window. But he was attentively studying Mr. Cattermole's manner, and the more he studied it, the lower grew his opinion of the man's integrity, and the higher his own hopes of success.

"And who is the person not concerned?" asked the officer, with a stress on the word, "to be delicately considered in this case?"

"A young lady."

Mr. Cattermole smiled. It was a smile that seemed to tell of conscious power. "Unfortunately, instead of being unconcerned in the case, sir, that is the very person whom the business touches."

For a moment Godfrey's head swam; then he steadied himself and spoke quickly. "On what charge?"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Godfrey Mayne. I understood you to say that you knew the case."

"I know it so well," said Godfrey slowly, "that I even know the young lady is taking upon herself the burden of a crime which she did not commit."

The words startled even the detective; and in a manner Godfrey had not thought possible with a member of such a profession. By a movement of the elbow Mr. Cattermole, who was sitting by the small fire-place, had brought the hearth broom down upon his feet; curiously too, the fall of the light wooden handle made him wince with pain. Godfrey was not too much interested to notice this.

"Perhaps you know who did commit it," resumed Mr. Cattermole. "I have a strong suspicion," replied Godfrey, assuming a good deal more certainty here than he felt.

The officer looked at him long and keenly. He was used to the study of men's faces, and even in the dusk Godfrey's stolid expression did not deceive him. "I am afraid your suspicion would not count for much against what *we know*," said he, civilly.

"Then, if you know so much, why waste time hanging about here, instead of at once apprehending the criminal?" cried Godfrey.

"You want to question too far, sir."

"And I will do it, too," said the young man, setting his teeth. "I will ride over this very night to Goule Park, and tell Sir William ——"

"And so defeat the very purpose you had in coming to me this evening," interrupted the other, in a hard voice of authority, which checked Godfrey's rising excitement.

"You have made a pretty shrewd guess in coming to me, or else a very lucky chance brought you; for I am cognisant of all the circumstances of the murder of young William Hunt. I know who committed it; I know where the criminal is, and it only rests with me whether the apprehension is or is not made at once."

Godfrey shook inwardly. Mr. Cattermole continued:

"I was in Rome two days after the murder was committed, and I could have laid my hand on the actual criminal then."

Godfrey hung forward, listening intently, unable to speak. Mr. Cattermole saw the tremor, and went on:

"I had not the heart to do it, and that's the truth, Mr. Mayne. She was so young and so pretty, and I knew it was done in a moment of passion, *not of intention*. So I let her escape—and, indeed, interference on my part would have been gratuitous, for the business was not mine. But it was known at head-quarters that I was acquainted with the case, and when Sir William Hunt wrote to Scotland Yard the other day, it was I who was sent down upon it."

"You spared her then, you might spare her now," cried Godfrey in agitation, not knowing what to think or believe.

"I cannot tell that," replied Mr. Cattermole. "For her own sake, I might be tempted to do it; but, unfortunately, Sir William is all alert, and he knows that some of the—the people—are here."

"Is it out of consideration for her that you have not already acted?"

"Out of pity—yes. And any leniency on my part would involve grave difficulties."

"To yourself?"

"Undoubtedly. See you not, sir, that if I were caught tripping in this case, or made a failure of it when the game is so ready to my hands, I should be ruined. Scotland Yard would send me packing."

"Even if it did—you might try a fresh life in America," said

Godfrey, with hesitation, uncertain how far he might venture. "With a thousand pounds in your pocket, you might do well."

"Catch thieves over there, instead of here," remarked Mr. Cattermole, pleasantly. "The young lady would have to get away also."

"But why?"

"She must do that in any case, and without much delay, if she is to avoid the worst. Sir William, as you probably are aware, does not know her by sight; as long as he does not see her *with* the other lady, she is safe. But when once the younger one is out of reach, even if he does see the elder he has no proof that he could bring against her, whatever his suspicions may be."

"You are sure of this?" asked Godfrey, thinking of his father.

"Absolutely sure. If the young lady stays here, neither of them is safe; if she goes, both are. That is the whole sum and substance of the matter. You see, sir, I am placing confidence in you."

"Yes; thank you. Do they know this themselves?"

"Why, of course they do. I am not so officially hard as you may deem me, Mr. Mayne; and I have taken my opportunities to *let* them know it—both mother and daughter."

Godfrey thought he understood now the reason of his sending notes to Miss Dixon, and of the hazardous intrusion of the previous night.

"But," he said aloud, "where could the young lady take refuge?"

"Not anywhere in this country—to be safe. You have mentioned the best place, for her, sir—America."

"America!" echoed Godfrey, startled. "How could she go all that way alone?—and stay there unprotected?"

"I would take her, and stay with her to protect her."

"You!" exclaimed Godfrey. "What are you thinking of? Are you mad?"

"Not in the least mad," said Mr. Cattermole. "I have reposed some confidence in you, sir, and I may as well go a little further. I have proposed to the young lady, and to her mother, to make her my wife. Don't fling away like that, sir! Listen: I have liked her ever since I saw her in Rome; I like her so much that I am willing to overlook that past blemish in her life—she was but a young thing at the time—and marry her. You surely do not think, Mr. Mayne, that a man who has worked himself up step by step to a difficult and responsible position, would throw up his career just for a few hundred pounds, as you have suggested to me? No, no, sir. You look down upon me and my profession; but, rough though I may appear, I was born a gentleman, the son of a gentleman, and reared one. It is not every man, allow me to say, who'd make a wife of a woman with the charge of murder hanging over her."

"You must be mistaken," said Godfrey, hotly, in his confusion. "She is engaged at this moment to a gentleman who knows all her history, and to whom she is attached."



"Yourself, perhaps?" said Mr. Cattermole.

"No, not myself."

"Are you sure he knows all her history?" returned the other, again speaking with conscious power. "Sir, I *know* he does not. Would he take one whom he may yet see in the criminal dock?"

"Would you force her to marry you against her will?" scornfully demanded Godfrey, in his disgust and alarm.

"No. Ask Miss Dixon, in presence of her mother, whether she will have this fine young gentleman for a husband, or whether she will escape with the detective who saved her and her mother—mind you say *and her mother*—at Rome. If she chooses him, I must do my duty. I do not pretend to be generous all round; or to benefit others without any recompense. Why, see you not, Mr. Godfrey Mayne, that I *must* do it if she stays here?"

Godfrey broke out in strong language. He was beside himself. "You deserve to smart for your presumption, and for your treachery," he continued. "The police authorities ought to know of this."

"Go and inform them," said Mr. Cattermole, who became more cold and steely as the young man took fire. "Even if you hadn't the best of reasons yourself for keeping this attempted negotiation private, what do you think any member of the police force, high or low, would say if you told him how a detective had tried to make a rascally arrangement with you for helping a criminal to escape justice? He would listen to your story quite gravely, and then say: 'Very sorry you were put out, sir; but a detective is obliged to resort to all sorts of dodges.' And when your back was turned he would laugh at your simplicity."

Godfrey walked to the end of the small room, convulsed with impotent rage; a burning wish to fly at the man's throat, was only restrained by the feeling that nothing short of strangling would either punish him as he deserved or render him innocuous. In the pause which followed the officer's cool speech, a step on the flag-stone outside and then in the passage was heard; there was a knock at the door of the room, and without waiting for permission Dick came in.

His arm was out of the sling, and was as free as the other. The bandage on his head had fallen on his neck.

"May I take these off now?" he asked meekly, without seeing Godfrey, who took the opportunity to turn to the door.

"I need not trouble you any longer, Mr. Cattermole," said he coldly; and Dick, scared at his enemy's voice, crouched down, frightened, by Mr. Cattermole's chair. "Good evening to you."

"Good evening, Mr. Godfrey Mayne," he answered, rising somewhat stiffly. And Godfrey noticed for the first time that the hand with which Mr. Cattermole grasped the arm of his chair was gloved.

"It is he who has the wounds, not Dick," thought Godfrey, as he left the farm; "but his head does not appear to have suffered: and I expect Scotland Yard would say that the invasion of my father's

house at midnight was all in the legitimate way of his business, and justify it!"

Godfrey Mayne returned to the Abbey, fuming with rage at the detective-officer's audacity. To imagine Mary Dixon, of refined nature and delicate instincts, in companionable contact with such a man was revolting. He might have been born and bred a gentleman, but he was anything but that now. Godfrey had not yet obtained a distinct, observant view of his face, but he felt that his feelings were as destitute of honour and chivalry as his general manners were of polish; that he was corrupt, or might be made so; and that if Mary had stood accused of all the crimes under the sun, this man's touch on her hand would be profanation. So decided Godfrey; and that Mary must be saved from him.

He himself could not save her, but Ernest Underwood might. Judging of the young man's feelings by his own, Godfrey supposed that he had but to whisper a word to him of Mary's danger, not stating its nature, to induce him to make her his wife with all speed, and carry her away out of reach of the clutches of wicked and self-interested police-officers. Perhaps Ernest had not yet left the Abbey, and he could speak to him now.

He dashed through the refectory, and into the drawing-room. Ernest was just gone. He was rushing out again, when Mary stepped forward and stopped him.

"Where are you going, Mr. Godfrey?"

"I want to speak to Ernest. Don't keep me"—entreatingly.

Even the clasp of her slender fingers on his sleeve could not keep him now; her safety might depend upon minutes. But she followed him into the hall, and clung to his arm.

"Mary, let me go! I pray you to let me go. You don't know what depends on it."

He was shaking her off again, gently, but surely and resolutely. She seized his right hand with both hers, and held it against her. Her soft, beseeching eyes were shining into his in the lamplight.

"Godfrey, stay with me! Say that you won't leave me!"

He felt all on fire; but what could he do? "Very well, I say it," he answered in despairing resignation.

But the words had scarcely left his lips before she dropped his hand, and stood apart from him. Godfrey would have taken her hand again.

"Don't touch me, don't touch me," she whispered imploringly. "You—you do not understand. And—I do not want you to speak to Ernest. Remember, you said you would not leave me."

"I remember," he replied, in a voice that sounded cold and proud. And he went to the hall door and flung it open, and stood there. He would not look at her. Then he heard a fall, and, turning, saw her lying on the floor. She had fainted—no doubt

from strong emotion. Her poor face lay white and still, her arms and hands were at rest. Godfrey was beside her in a moment, kneeling, calling out for anybody whose name came first; and it was not until he had transferred her head softly from his own knee to Lydia's, and seen Mrs. Garner hurrying from the housekeeper's room, and Mary assisted to her own, that he took advantage of his liberty to follow Ernest.

"I did not promise her not to speak to him," Godfrey told himself, which perhaps savoured of sophistry; "and it is for her safety that I must do it."

"Mr. Ernest is gone to London, sir," was the answer that met him at the Grange. "He started in the dog-cart to catch the train not five minutes ago."

Godfrey felt a weight of black anxiety suddenly lifted from his shoulders. This abrupt departure could only mean one thing: Ernest must have been told enough of Mary's danger to be preparing at once some safe shelter for her until he could make her his wife. It did not occur to Godfrey to ask the servant any particulars, or he might possibly have doubted his own conclusion.

He saw no more of Mary that night. The schoolroom window and the greenhouse had been mended in the day, but Godfrey felt pretty sure that Mr. Cattermole's feet were not yet in a condition for another midnight invasion; neither, perhaps, was another necessary. However, he patrolled the house once or twice during the night, and on one occasion met his father doing the same and pointing an old flint-lock pistol at a statue on the staircase, in alarm at his son's footsteps. And after having been seized and pounded by Mrs. Garner, who was taking a reconnaissance in undress, Godfrey retired, satisfied that any intruder would have a warm time of it.

He puzzled himself about Mary's unwillingness for him to speak to Ernest, which had led her to play him a trick, the result of which she herself could not measure. In that one moment, when she had drawn his hand into hers and called him by his name, it had stirred his very soul; for there was a look in her face and a soft witchery in her tone which seemed to say she loved him.

He asked her the next morning at breakfast what it was that was taking Ernest to town in such a hurry. She answered that he had been neglecting his work lately, and she had recommended him to make up for lost time.

"You know," added Mary, "he has annoyed his father lately by being so idle and by running into debt; so that our engagement has to be a secret until he has worked himself into favour again."

Godfrey was not satisfied. Colonel Underwood was never annoyed at anything his son did; and Ernest might ride, or drive, or dress himself into favour, but he would certainly never work himself into anything. He was always running backwards and for-

wards to town, where he was supposed to be studying for the bar with a professional man; but it was a standing joke that he took his lessons on the box-seat of a four-in-hand.

On this day, Saturday, Mr. Mayne and Godfrey were engaged to join a sporting party at a nobleman's house several miles distant from Croxham. Godfrey would now willingly have excused himself, but he had no plea to offer his father for doing so. They left home betimes, and were not back until night.

Mrs. Mayne did not attempt to go to church in the morning on account of her foot, though she had walked out of doors the previous day. Neither did Mary go, which caused Godfrey vexation. He expressed it as he proceeded thither with his father.

"What is she staying away for, sir, do you know? All right-minded girls like to be at church on Sunday morning."

"Well, I suppose she is staying at home to sit with her mother," replied Mr. Mayne. "And I'm sure, Godfrey, I don't see any difference that it can make to you; you seem to regard it as a personal grievance. If it were Elspeth, now, I——"

"Yes, yes," laughed Godfrey, recovering his good humour; "if it were Elspeth, I suppose I might ask leave of the Vicar to stay away myself to sit with her? Is that it, father?"

"I don't know whether it's 'it' or not, Godfrey," returned his father. "You young people do your courting in a very different fashion from what mine was when I was young. There's no ardour in it, lad, and be hanged if I can see that there's any love."

"Fashions change with the times, you know, sir," replied Godfrey, demurely.

"So it seems," concluded Mr. Mayne, as they reached the church-yard gate.

After service, in going home, they overtook Nancy and her father. Mr. Mayne fell into conversation with the farmer; Godfrey drew behind with Nancy. He began reproaching her in a semi-serious tone for her sinfulness in coming late, service having commenced nearly half-an-hour when she stole up the aisle to her pew.

"It does not happen often, and I felt downright ashamed of myself," answered Nancy. "Just as I was about starting, father having walked gently on, mother was taken with shivering, a sort of ague-fit, and I stayed behind attending to her. I wanted to stay altogether, but she got better and would not let me. The fact is, Master Godfrey, that Dick's new pranks have upset her seriously."

"I don't wonder at it," returned Godfrey.

"I fancy Mr. Cattermole has taken the opportunity of people being at church to enjoy an interview with his *aunt* and *cousin*," said Nancy, stealing a glance at Godfrey, and laying a laughing emphasis on the two words.

"Why so," he asked, with flashing eyes.

"I saw Miss Dixon and her mother in the plantation when I came

out, sir, and Mr. Cattermole was walking towards them with a limp in his gait."

Godfrey felt boiling over with rage. They must have planned to meet him—and come out for the purpose! What could he do against this underhand conspiracy? Was Mrs. Mayne in league with the man to sacrifice her daughter?

As soon as he got indoors, he sat down to write a hurried letter to Ernest. Mrs. Mayne was keeping her room again; and gave never a hint to her unsuspecting husband that she had been down stairs.

"DEAR ERNEST,—I hope you won't think I am taking a great liberty in interfering in your affairs. I remember we scowled at each other like stage-villains on Thursday night, but it was before I knew she cared about you; now I know she does, nobody will congratulate you more sincerely. I will prove you this. I have found out by accident the danger she is in; she tells me that you know more than I do; I therefore conclude you are gone to town to make preparations to save her from it. But I know more of it than she is aware of, and I want to tell you that it is drawing very near, so that there is no time to lose, and the sooner you get her away from this place, the better. If it is any question of funds—the most lucky of us are short at times—I can help you, for I chance to have a few hundred pounds of my own lying idle at Coutts's, and I know, old friend, you will not scruple to make use of them in this emergency. One line from you, and you shall receive my cheque by return. I have not heard anything of your plans and hers, but I suppose you will be married by special licence upon her arrival in town, and then go off to some place of safety. It would save time if I brought her up to you, while you make your preparations and get the licence ready. I swear that she should come to you safe from her enemies, if I had to cut my way through a troop of dragoons. You need not be jealous of me, for I don't think she would say 'Thank you' to me if I jumped into the sea for her, unless it were to pull you out.—Yours very sincerely,  
"GODFREY MAYNE."

The writing of this letter caused Godfrey to be late at the luncheon table. Mary enquired what he had been doing.

"Writing to Ernest Underwood," he said; and he saw her cheeks flush at the answer.

Mr. Mayne always attended church in the afternoon: Godfrey but rarely; for at the afternoon service Mary always sat at the other end of the church among the school-children, whose former prejudice against her had totally, as already mentioned, given way; not so much under the influence of her personal character, as of toffee and a nasty but popular black sweetmeat made of liquorice and other things and sold in sticks. But on this afternoon Godfrey resolved to go. He saw her go up to her room to dress, and he went through the refectory into the garden and gathered her a sprig of



geranium and some mignonette; then he returned to the hall and waited for her till the church-bells had ceased. Concluding that she had started, he went off to the church by himself, glanced down the ranks of the school-children without seeing her, and marched up to the Abbey pew. His father was there alone, in his seat at the outside end of the pew. Godfrey went in hesitatingly.

"Where is Mary?" he whispered, as soon as they stood up.

"She said she was not coming this afternoon," replied Mr. Mayne.

Godfrey instantly grew inattentive, fidgetted, and then disturbed everybody near by upsetting all the books in front of him with one sweep on to the floor. His father, scandalised, stared at him.

"Godfrey, if you feel faint again, you had better go out."

This was merely meant as a hint for him to conduct himself properly; but Godfrey instantly seized his hat, squeezed past his indignant father, went out of the pew, down the aisle, and through the porch, to the gaping surprise of the congregation.

He was back at the Abbey in a few moments, and had searched the house for her, knocking and calling at the different doors. Last he went to that of Mrs. Mayne.

"Who is it?" said the voice of his step-mother.

"It is I," replied Godfrey. "May I come in?"

"Not now," came the quick answer. "I want to sleep if I can."

"Is Mary here?"

"Yes, she is here"—after a brief pause. "Don't tease her now, Godfrey, she is tired."

And Godfrey knew as well as if he had been in the room that Mary was not there. A presentiment flashed over him that she had gone to the farm to hold another interview with that man. With a furious step, Godfrey strode thither. He saw nobody about but a little girl, Mrs. Wilding's niece, who had come on a visit.

"Are they all out, Susan?"

"Yes, sir; they are all gone to church."

"And Mr. Cattermole—where is he?"

"He went out, too, sir; just after the others."

"Can you tell me which way he went? I want to know."

"No, sir," hesitated Susan. Of course she knew, having watched him from behind the muslin blind.

"Now what a pity that is! I've got a shilling, that is burning a hole in my pocket, for anybody that can tell me."

"He went that way, sir; right out at the gate and along the lane to the left."

"Godfrey gave her the shilling, and was in the lane in a moment, hurrying up it into the plantation. He glanced to right and left, and listened as he walked. The place was so thickly wooded as to make search difficult; but presently he saw them coming along towards him, walking slowly side by side. Godfrey drew back among the trees, so as not to be seen. Mary wore a bonnet and veil, and a shawl

on her shoulders ; Mr. Cattermole's hat was brought low upon his head and his hands were gloved. Now that Godfrey saw his face by daylight, he did not like it at all.

But the strongest impression that the sight of Mr. Cattermole now produced upon Godfrey was, that he was the ideal of what a detective should be ; stolid, commonplace, uninteresting, with nothing furtive, nothing salient about him, a man one would pass without notice ; and yet shrewd, and authoritative and impressive when he chose, as he was last night to him, as he was now to Mary. He was speaking to her in a low voice, but with a deliberate earnestness which enforced attention. To Godfrey, fiercely prejudiced against him, his look and manner were bad, but it was with a badness not striking to a casual observer. From his iron-grey head to his slowly moving feet, now encased in a large pair of carpet slippers, he looked respectable and uninteresting. The first words Godfrey caught were his.

"You have kept your word to her through everything, she tells me : you have loved her, been devoted to her. For her sake, keep your word to her now, and come away quietly with me. Remember, it will save all scandal to these people you have been living among. They do not expect you to stay here for ever ; let them think you have joined that sisterhood of which you have spoken to them."

"But my life !" wailed the girl in a low voice, shrinking back : and by this hesitation enabling Godfrey to hear more than if they had hurried past.

"Your life is safe ; and it will not be hard, as you seem to think," said the detective rather impatiently ; yet speaking always in his soft, sweet voice : "I have lost time enough over this business, as you well know, and I cannot afford much more. If you do not come to a speedy decision—"

"I will, I will," she interrupted in a tone of anguish ; "but you cannot wonder that I shrink from it. Either alternative is so very terrible."

"That of the criminal dock is terrible," he answered sternly. "As matters are being let drift on now, there's a good chance of all the people connected with that past matter speedily standing in it. Have you no pity for your mother?"

"You need not ask that," she answered.

"To escape with me, and under my protection, is absolutely the only alternative left you," continued the detective. "I will not be played with any longer. If you do not agree, I must—"

"I will tell you my decision to-morrow for certain," she spoke hastily, as if wishing to stop his words. "Spare me until to-morrow."

"That will be quite the latest. I have delayed too long. Every day I am expecting that Scotland Yard will be sending someone down to see into things. Especially if Sir William Hunt—"

"Yes, yes, I know what you would say. When you gave the explanation to mamma this morning I saw the necessity of something being done without delay—"

Godfrey heard no more. They had passed him ; the man earnest, imperious ; the girl shrinking, trembling. He could scarcely restrain himself from dashing out from his ambush to take advantage of the tempting pond to give the tyrant at least a ducking, and from throwing his arms round Mary to vow that she should be saved in spite of herself. But this vow could be better kept by saying nothing about it. He waited until after he judged that they had had time to separate at the plantation gate, in which direction they had disappeared, and then he followed. There was no one about. He went through the garden into the Abbey, and saw Mary at the foot of the stairs, about to go up. His heart ached for her as she tried to speak to him brightly and lightly, to ward off any suspicion.

"Where have you been, Mr. Godfrey ? Not to church, I'm afraid ; you are back too soon."

"How is it you are not at church ?" asked Godfrey.

"I had a headache, so I went for a walk instead. By-the-bye, you said something at luncheon about writing to Ernest ; is it too late for me to send him a message ?"

"I said I had written. I can tear up the envelope and charge the penny to him."

Mary laughed. "It does not matter. I'll write him a whole independent letter another day. Mamma wants to see you," she continued. "She says you never come to speak to her now."

"I was at her door not long ago," returned Godfrey, "and she would not admit me ; she said she wanted to sleep."

"But she is awake now. Come."

Mary ran lightly up to her mother's room, and introduced Godfrey. She left him with her mother—who was lying on the sofa to rest her foot, and looked as if she had been crying instead of sleeping, and seemed in very low spirits—and went to her own room.

There she penned a hasty note to Ernest ; its purport being to warn him not to pay attention to anything he might hear from Godfrey, who had, she lightly ran on, to be entertained with no end of silly fables to keep his suspicions off the truth. This letter she asked Emily, who was going out to meet her sweetheart, to put in the post-office, there being no letter-bag from the Abbey on a Sunday evening. Godfrey strolled to the post-office after leaving Mrs. Mayne, and posted his letter himself ; so that both letters would reach Ernest Underwood's chambers by the same delivery on the following morning.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### PUTTING UP USELESS BARS.

IN coming back from the post-office Godfrey called at the blacksmith's, whose place was nearly opposite to the Vicarage gate. As it was Sunday, he got at him with difficulty, and found him rather

drunk. He looked at Godfrey in disgust and astonishment on finding that the young man wanted him to do a bit of work at once.

"On Sunday! Well, sir, I never should have thought as—"

"Where's Ben?" interposed Godfrey.

Ben was the blacksmith's eldest son, and he was watching a dog-fight near by.

"Are you too good to work on Sunday?" asked Godfrey of Ben.

"No, sir."

"Have you got a couple of iron bars, three feet four inches long, that you could put across a window?"

"I have not got 'em ready, sir."

"Can you have them ready, and put them up this evening?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right. Come up to the Abbey and ask for me. Say nothing to anybody."

Godfrey walked home to dinner. Mrs. Mayne had come downstairs for it. Towards its close Mrs. Mayne spoke of the Sisterhood which Mary had proposed to join when she first came to the Abbey. This question had been again mooted within the past few days, and a letter which had come addressed to Mary on this same morning was understood to have reference to it.

"She shall do nothing of the kind," said Mr. Mayne irritably, in answer to his wife's remark. "Where do you say this place is—?"

"At Kensington," said Mary.

"Kensington!" echoed Mr. Mayne. "Why I thought you said, Laura, it was at——"

"Only a branch of it is at Kensington; not the one Mary will go to, I think," timidly interposed his wife, with a curious warning glance at Mary.

"And pray, Mary, what duties do you expect to have to perform?" he went on.

"I must visit the sick and the poor, I suppose, and—but I shall know more about it when I get there," replied Mary, nervously.

"Well, then, my dear, I tell you that you shall *not* go," he repeated. "I absolutely forbid it. You need nursing yourself, and have done for the last week, and this anxiety to go away is nothing but the feverish restlessness arising from ill-health. You have every comfort at the Abbey, child, and when you know how much your leaving it would hurt and annoy me, I should have to think you not only silly but ungrateful."

He spoke in a deeply-wounded tone. Mary was crying. "I don't want to go away; but I've promised, and I must," said she, in a voice that went to Godfrey's heart.

"There is no 'must' in the case," answered Mr. Mayne. "I say you shall not——when your mother is ill, and wants you, too!"

"Then let mamma decide for me," said the girl quickly.

"I think," said Mrs. Mayne, whose hands were quivering nervously, "that Mary ought to go."

"And I think," said her husband, growing really angry, "that you are both talking undutiful nonsense. I have made up my mind: and pray let no more be said about it."

When Godfrey went to the drawing-room after dinner, only Mary was there. She, as if anxious to escape his watchful eyes, turned to leave it.

"I am tired, and going to my room," she said, by way of excuse.

"You had better stay here," said Godfrey. "A man is coming to do some work in the schoolroom, and the noise would disturb you."

"What man? What work?" she asked, with a start of surprise.

"Ben Griffiths is going to put some bars before the window, so that Dick may not frighten you again."

"But I thought all that was mended on Friday."

"Not to my satisfaction," replied Godfrey. "When I looked at it to-day, I saw that a strong arm and hand could undo, without much difficulty, what has been done. So I have told Ben to bring up a couple of iron bars."

Even as he spoke, Hawkins came to say Ben was there. Godfrey went to the schoolroom, and watched him at his work.

"It would take more than an idiot to get over those," he remarked, when it was nearly over.

"Yes, sir," said the lad, and looked at him shrewdly.

"You heard all about the business, of course," said Godfrey, wondering what the thought was that caused the twinkle in Ben's keen, grey eyes.

"Oh, yes, sir."

"What do they say of this outbreak of Master Dick's in the village?"

"They say a good many things in the village just now, sir, since it's been known there was a detective about."

"A detective!" exclaimed Godfrey. "And who is he after?"

"Don't know, I'm sure, sir."

Godfrey regarded the shrewd young Northerner, popularly supposed to have the makings in him of a great rascal. "Are you quite sure you don't, Ben?"

"Well, they do say that we ought to know more about it at this end of the parish than they do at the other. But that's all, sir."

"A cock-and-bull tale, I expect, Ben? Who knows him? Detectives don't go about with a label on their back."

"No, sir. But Jo Longton, who is porter at Cheston Station now, and was before that, at Rigby, says this same man, as he's a'most sure it is, came there twelve months ago after a chap who was wanted."

Leaving Ben to complete his job, Godfrey went back to the drawing-room. Mary was not there. Restless and uneasy, as he



could but feel now if she was ten minutes out of his sight, he wandered into the hall, and half-way up the stairs again. There he heard Mrs. Mayne's door shut, and saw Mary leaving her mother's room. She caught sight of Godfrey, and beckoned him up to her.

"Can you amuse yourself for the rest of the evening, Mr. Godfrey? I am so tired, I want to go to my room already," said she with a new kindness, a new gentleness in look and manner which intoxicated him.

"I can frolic and gambol about by myself till doomsday, if it will save you fatigue," said he. He was kneeling with one knee on the topmost stair at her feet, and lounging against the banisters.

"Yes, you are always kind. I know that—and—and good-night."

She gave him her hand, and would have withdrawn it quickly, and hurried away, but it was only the second time she had given him encouragement enough to kiss it, and Godfrey was in the mood to make the most of his chance. He drew it into both his and, burying as much of his face as he could in it, pressed his lips to the little pink palm.

"What makes you so kind to me to-night?" he asked suddenly, with a new fear in his eyes.

And she began to tremble and to try to draw her hand away. His tone changed.

"Well, never mind why. I am thankful for it. And you won't talk any more about 'selfish infatuations,' will you?"

"Not so long as you remember that you are engaged, and that I am engaged, and that you are only my brother."

Godfrey knew that was an arrangement that never answered; but he knew better than to say so. He instantly sealed the proffered relationship with another kiss on her wrist, and this time his fair hair brushed the flower at her bosom. Drawing her hand away, she left him.

She had never treated him like that before, for a true instinct told him that her sweetness to-night was no artifice to blind him, but the result of real feeling: he almost fancied that he was loved. He walked to his own room, delirious with happiness. But the delirium did not last long. The suspicion which had flashed upon him, even while she spoke, came back to him now: this might be a last relenting impulse of kindness before she left the Abbey—if indeed she did leave it.

Godfrey knew not what to think. There appeared to be some imminent cause why she should leave it, and with Mr. Cattermole. Mr. Cattermole had spoken to him of marrying her for her protection, as it seemed; but his manner to the girl herself gave forth no token of tenderness for her, or of love; and Godfrey felt almost disposed to doubt whether that had not been a mere device on the detective's part spoken on the spur of the moment to mislead or anger Godfrey, or to make him acquiesce quietly in her departure.

He could not rest. He was anxious for her protection, as he

would have been for that of a sister, and a vague feeling of uneasiness lay upon him with regard to the movements of the detective. As a detective the man might consider himself justified in entering the Abbey again at night to obtain speech of Mary or of Mrs. Mayne. Did he possess false keys to open house doors at will? Probably.

Quite late, when everybody ought to be in bed, Godfrey went to the school room. He meant to stay there for a bit, eyes and ears alike alert. Down he sat upon the old horsehair sofa; and whilst thinking he was listening with all his ears—fell asleep.

He awoke with a start—his fears realised. Someone was in the room, trying softly the handle of Mary's door; then softly knocking at it. Godfrey was on his feet in a moment, his hands stretched out to seize on the intruder. It was too dark to see anything, but he felt sure it could only be Mr. Cattermole.

Mr. Cattermole eluded the grasp, and seemed to make, Godfrey thought, for the window; Godfrey, in blind pursuit after him, fell over a chair, and threw it down with a noise. *Nobody* seemed to be in the room, and Godfrey took a match from his pocket and lighted it. The room was quite empty; the door leading into the corridor was shut: the large cupboard in the wall by the side of the fire-place, which Godfrey opened, was empty also.

"Who is there?" came the voice of Mary, who must have been disturbed by the noise. "Who is that at my door?" she added, having got no answer.

What should Godfrey say? Here was a nice predicament for a newly adopted brother. He did not want to frighten her by telling her that someone had been there, nor did he feel at all sure that he should be able to prove it. The sudden, unaccountable disappearance of the intruder had confounded him.

"Say what you have to say through the door," said she in a low, hard voice.

But he had nothing to say. He thought he had better steal off and hope for the morning light to give him some inspiration for an excuse or apology. And yet, could he go off without satisfying himself that she was safe from further intrusion? No, he wouldn't, and she must think what she liked. He undrew the curtains and pulled up the blinds; and while doing this spoke a hasty word, which betrayed him.

"Godfrey!" he heard Mary exclaim. "Can it be you?"

"Yes," he answered; "I came to see that things were safe." Rather to his surprise she unlocked her door and walked in, a lighted candle in her hand. She was in the silk dress she had worn that evening; she had not been to bed at all.

"Was it you who tried my door?"

Godfrey nodded: not liking to alarm her, but not choosing to tell a deliberate untruth.

"I am glad!—oh, I am very glad!"

Godfrey looked infinitely astonished. She smiled, and a moment after said hesitatingly—"I am not afraid of *you*. I know if you came, it was with some good motive. While you were at hand to take care of me, I could go to sleep like a trusting child."

This overwhelming confidence took his breath away. She went on with a sudden change to anxiety. "But there was someone here beside you. Did you not hear the noise?"

"I thought I heard—a cat."

"Why don't you say a cow?" said Mary, her eyes twinkling, in spite of her anxiety, in the almost hysterical relief she felt at the unexpected presence of one she could trust. But the smile died out again from her face as she stooped and snatched something from the floor. It was something so small that it escaped Godfrey's eyes altogether; but he saw the movement, and asked what she had found. She answered, shaking from head to foot.

"Something which proves that someone has been here besides you."

"No, I daresay I dropped that," cried Godfrey, without the least idea what it was, but alarmed by the terrible misery in her eyes.

"No, no," she said, bursting into tears. "I—I wish you had." And she began to glance fearfully round the room.

But there was no one in it but themselves, no one in the cupboard, for Mary opened it as Godfrey had done, and the outer door was safely shut. They looked at each other, as if asking what the mystery could be, and whither the intruder could have betaken himself.

"My father is still in the Swallow Chamber: I would advise you to go to your mother's room for the night," remarked Godfrey.

"I think I will," said Mary. And I hope you will go to yours now and get a good night's sleep."

"No," answered Godfrey, "I shall stay here in the schoolroom."

"Oh—but—surely there's no necessity for it. Nobody will dare to come a second time."

"All the same, I shall stay to see."

He lighted her along the gallery and saw her softly open her mother's door and enter. Godfrey was not again disturbed, and got some snatches of sleep on the hard horsehair sofa. His broken rest had not improved his appearance, and he was rallied by his father at breakfast for looking like a scare-crow.

Mary joined quite heartily in the laugh against him. This made him cross, he thought her ungrateful, and he called women all sorts of names in the refectory by himself: after first going round to the farmhouse, however, and learning from the servant that Mr. Cattermole was not up yet.

They're a set of ungrateful, heartless creatures, and they oughtn't to have human faces at all, for they haven't human feelings, he thought ferociously; and drawing his head sharply in through the

window as he heard a sound behind him, he found Mary with a glass of sherry and some sandwiches on a salver.

"You did not touch anything at breakfast, Mr. Godfrey. You must eat these; I cut them for you. And why don't you smoke? That always makes you better-tempered."

"Do you mean to say that I'm ill-tempered?" said he, taking the salver from her and drawing his hands over hers as he did so.

"Certainly. You are the worst-tempered man I ever met."

"And don't you like ill-tempered men?"

"Of course not. Nobody does. Come, I shall see you light your cigar before I go away again." But she coolly took up his box of fuses herself and struck one; then, as he seized her other hand, she let the fusee fall on his fingers and burn them.

"Oh, I am so sorry! I only wanted you to light a cigar. Please take one out."

He thought it better to obey without further demonstration, but he asked very quietly:

"Are you a true, loving woman?—or a hard and deceitful one?"

"I don't know. And it does not in the least concern you." But when she reached the door she turned, and he saw that there were tears in her eyes. "Whether I am woman, or fiend, or angel," said she in a very low voice, "for all the kindness and generosity that I have never thanked you for, I thank you now."

Soon after that, in passing through the gallery, Godfrey heard sounds within Mrs. Mayne's room; the mother talking fast in persuasive tones, Mary sobbing bitterly. He could do nothing; and, as an outlet to his feelings, he rushed off again to the farm. Nancy saw him this time. Mr. Cattermole was not down stairs yet, she said, but she could hear him getting up.

"Was he out last night, Nancy?" he asked. "Quite late; past eleven?"

"That he was not, Master Godfrey. He was tired, he said, and went to his room before ten o'clock."

Godfrey could not make it out. He stayed in the kitchen, talking to Nancy, who was slicing kidney beans for dinner, until Mr. Cattermole should be down. While there, Miss Dixon came to the house door and asked to see the lodger. She was shown into his parlour, and he came down to her.

Godfrey, who would not show himself, sat in an agony of suspense. In about twenty minutes, during which not the faintest sound of voices in converse could be heard within it, the door opened; and, with a quiet "Good morning, Miss Dixon," "Good morning, Mr. Cattermole," they separated.

It was now Godfrey's turn, and he went in. The detective was looking glumpy, and told Godfrey, with every appearance of truth, that the young lady had prevailed upon him to let her slip through his fingers again.

"It is hard upon me, and I expect I shall get into trouble over it," he grumbled. "But she pleaded so feelingly. It appears she's attached to that young Underwood, and they are to be married shortly. Any way, she has promised me to get away from here not later than to-morrow. She has got to do that for her mother's sake as well as her own."

"And how is she to get away?" inquired Godfrey. "She ought not to go to London alone."

"Ernest Underwood is coming for her," said the other, lowering his voice. "Not but that a well-conducted young lady is safe, travel where she may."

Godfrey paused. "How do you know he is coming?"

"Miss Dixon has just told me. He has sent her word that he will be down to day."

Godfrey concluded that she must have had a telegram, as no post came in from London on Monday morning, and that it had been sent in answer to his own letter. "Then I am to understand, Mr. Cattermole, that neither Miss Dixon nor the Abbey will be molested—by the law—again?"

"Not again; so far as I am concerned."

"And what do you propose to do yourself?"

"I shall not be here long now; my occupation's gone, as Othello says. Just a few days more of it to make peace with Sir William, which can only be done by throwing dust in his eyes; and then Croxham will see me no more, sir."

"Very good," replied Godfrey. He hoped it was all true and genuine; and for the present he did not say what he had come to say.

From the farm he went on to the Vicarage, and was just in time to see the Thornhill family start upon their journey, and to wish them Godspeed.

"You will not forget your promise Godfrey," whispered the Vicar, as he shook hands with him—"to be away from Croxham by the end of the week."

"I will keep it, sir; all being well."

But Godfrey would not have spoken so confidently had he foreseen the crisis, even then close at hand, fated to be brought about by the action of Mr. Cattermole.

*(To be continued.)*





## MARY RUSSELL MITFORD.

SOME of those whose names, in art or letters, are as household words among us, have, with toil and effort, struggled up into fame, while others have glided into it almost as if it were a matter of course that they should reach it. Of this latter class is the history of Mary Russell Mitford. She stepped into celebrity as easily as she did into the figure of her first country dance in her first ball-room experiences.

There were various causes for the quickness and ease with which Miss Mitford's name became known in her day. In the first place, her parents were on terms of close intimacy with many of the most distinguished people of their time, who belonged to the aristocracy of both birth and intellect, and all of these were naturally interested in the bright, lively-witted girl, and did their utmost to bring her forward. Constant intercourse with such visitors at her father's house had also sharpened prematurely, no doubt, her faculties, and given her whole character something of calmness and assurance which is not very common in youth. Besides all this, Mary Mitford certainly, like many highly-gifted girls, ripened early, and sprang at once into considerable intellectual power, though the best fruit of her talents is most decidedly that of her middle age, "Our Village."

Mary Russell Mitford was born in 1787. Her father, Dr. Mitford, was one of the most popular men of his day in the best English society of the period. Gentlemanly manners were his birthright, coming to him from the race from which he sprang, and his genial, sunny, affectionate nature, and ready tongue made him, with these, a welcome guest in every drawing-room, and at every table.

There were most grave faults in his character, as the future story of his daughter will show; but there was a certain lovable, attractive sweetness about the man which caused these faults to be overlooked by friends, and wife and child alike. Mrs. Mitford, in many respects, widely differed from her husband; but she possessed, in common with him, those social qualities which easily win friends. Moreover, she had a calm, gentle temper, which enabled her to live far more tranquilly and happily at Dr. Mitford's side than a woman of an anxious, restless temperament would have done. The pair were always gay, always in love with each other, always in a crowd, always full of talk, and always empty of pocket, yet always dressing and dining as if they had gold mines in their garden.

From her very babyhood little Mary breathed an atmosphere of love and of wit. Her parents idolised her, for she was an only child, and a child whose sparkling face and eager busy prattle showed soon

that she would do them honour and credit in the world : and she gave back their affection in no scant measure, and displayed for them both, and for her handsome, brilliant father especially, a tender devotion which colours her whole life. She began to learn the meaning of talking well almost before she learnt her alphabet, and she put the lesson in practice with wondrous rapidity, as, after dinner at dessert, she sat on the knee of some gentleman guest, or, in her mother's drawing-room, chattered with childish grace about the pattern of her doll's new dress-hat.

As she grew older she began to understand, with the singular sharpness of brain with which she was gifted, what the people around her were talking about : and they were no commonplace subjects which were discussed by Dr. Mitford's guests. She took in this way, almost instinctively and without effort, just as a clear stream reflects the objects on its banks, many an idea concerning politics, and art, and literature ; and as years went on she put forth opinions of her own on all these points—opinions produced by lively active thought on what she heard ; and the men and women who were her parents' friends listened to her kindly, and smiled approvingly as they watched the play of her expressive features.

Thus, brooded over by the soft, broad opinions of strong love, yet allowed to gaze out with a long, steadfast look from beneath those sheltering wings at the things and people around her, Mary Mitford glided on from childhood into early womanhood. During the later years of her education she was sent to a good school in London, where she acquired a large store of book knowledge, and carried off many a school prize triumphantly. Still, no doubt she gained her best teaching, and the teaching which was most useful to her in after life, as she played or listened in her home.

She was no beauty ; yet was there a meaning in her eyes, a flash in her smile, a miracle of sympathy, and a feeling in her changeful cheek, her mobile mouth, and earnest brow which more than mere regularity of outline attracted to her every eye. Her figure was short, but she had a brisk light way of moving about which was not ungraceful ; her merry childish prattle had developed into a bright stream of conversation in which many a spark of wit glistened ; her head was stored with quite enough knowledge to make her seem something of a wonder in days when a well-educated woman was a very rare bird indeed in society. When we take all these things into consideration, we cannot be surprised that Mary Mitford became a pet about whom much was thought and said among the men and women with handles to their names, and the authors and artists who daily came down in their carriages to Dr. Mitford's country house near Reading.

The picture of Mary Mitford's youth, at this period, is a very bright picture as it rises up before us.

At one time she is visiting in the North of England among her father's relations, and is being made much of, in old-fashioned,

quaint manor houses, by stately uncles and prim lady aunts. Next she is in a London drawing-room, with the grave brows of statesmen and thinkers unbent as they lean over her chair, and smile at her playful sayings. Bye-and-bye we find her back again in her home, as sunny and contented as if she had never gone beyond its gates. Now she is reading in the arbour, the intent earnestness of eye and lip telling that hers is no light skimming over of the pages before her. Now she is in the garden reviewing with a keen glance the lately arrived, gayly dressed squadrons of spring flowers. Now she is sitting at her father's side, listening with bright, eager interest to the description of one of his favourite coursing-matches—for Dr. Mitford was a sportsman of no mean degree. Now she is having a hearty game of play with the numerous dogs, who were sure never to be wanting wherever Dr. Mitford's home might be, and who were always his and his daughter's constant companions.

Mary Mitford was still little more than a girl when her first book of poems appeared in print. Her fancies had long flowed almost naturally into rhyme, and thus found their way on to paper. Her parents, who had from the very first, been made the confidants of her childish authorship, were full of pride and delight as the little volume, with their daughter's name on the title-page, went forth into the world. The book was well received, partly from its own real merit, which was doubtless considerable when the age of the authoress was taken into account, and partly from the interest and favour with which it was regarded by the young lady's crowd of influential friends. The poetess was most fully encouraged to go on and to hope to prosper.

Mary Mitford was not slow to profit by the impulse forward thus given her. Now that the poems had succeeded, something more ambitious must be tried; but what should that something be? It was the age of play-going, when one of the first great events in little Mary's life had been being taken to a play. Mrs. Siddons and her brothers were making the heroes and heroines of the drama real beings of flesh and blood to English minds, and were spreading round the theatre a halo of light which naturally was attractive to all young, warm imaginations. Thus, the period when Mary Mitford was a girl was not only a play-going period, but it was a play-writing period too. Every young man of talent wrote his play, and every romantic school-girl had her tragedy hidden away, blistered with her tears, in a secret drawer of her desk. Plays were, to the literary world of those times, what novels are to the literary world of to-day. Some thousands were written, and some hundred or so found their way to the surface of the great ocean of public attention and favour. Young Mary Mitford was therefore only doing what it was almost an instinct with every clever intellectual young man and woman of her time to do when, after the success of her poems, she wrote a play.

To the joy and triumph of the young poetess and her parents, the play flashed into public notice just as the volume of poetry had done. It was both read and acted, and was talked of and admired in both the drawing-room and the theatre. This came to pass probably in some measure because there was far more in it than in most of the dramatic productions with which the young England of that day were favouring the world and wearing out the patience of much-enduring literary friends. But most certainly, also, Mary Mitford's first play, like her first poems, owed, in part, its immediate popularity to the position held by her parents and herself in the best and most intellectual society of the time. A second play soon followed the first, and Miss Mitford's literary reputation became an article in the literary creed of the period.

Vast was the shower of honours of all kinds which now began to pour in from all quarters, on the young authoress. Men of European fame wrote her letters of flattering compliment. Women whose drawing-rooms were regarded as very temples of fashion by maids and matrons who cast longing, but hopeless glances towards their doors, asked her to their houses, and fêted and petted her. Royalty itself took its share in the general chorus round her. The Prince Regent asked to be introduced to her, and addressed to her several very empty but very pretty speeches. All this incense might very well have turned a mature head wearing a legal wig or a shovel hat, let alone a young head wearing a wreath and a coronet of plaits. It is, therefore, little to be wondered that at this period Mary Mitford grew to have a somewhat exalted idea of herself and her own talents, and that her adoring parents were intoxicated with pride and pleasure.

Mary Mitford's poetical writings, highly though they were esteemed in her own day, have now ceased to find a place on our book-shelves; they had not in them enough of the immortal spark of genius to make them live. But there is one book of hers which still survives among us, and still is loved and honoured, and this is, "Our Village."

There are various reasons why Mary Mitford's prose book has reached a niche in literature which was never attained by her more ambitious poetical works. It is the fruit of her maturer years, and of more ripened thought; it has in it more heart and sympathy than her poetry, always a telling point in the writings of women; and, moreover, its subject strikes exactly the cord in her mental organisation which vibrates with the harmony of real genius. "Our Village" seems to have been the very thing which the intellect of Mary Mitford was intended to produce.

Miss Mitford's history has fewer dark spots in it than the history of most human lives. Still there is one shadow which we find frequently falling across it, though her sunny nature prevented her feeling it as much as many people in her place would have done.

This shadow was caused by the incorrigible, boundless extravagance of Dr. Mitford, her father. He quickly ran through the fortune of his wife, who was an heiress, and after that he did the same by a second fortune which was left him by one of his own relations. After this second exploit, he and his family were forced to leave Bertram House, their comfortable home of several years' standing, and to retire into a cottage at Three Mile Cross. No doubt Mary Mitford often wished that things, in this respect, might have been different with her father's character, but this fault of his, and all the many discomforts and deprivations which it must have brought upon her, never seem for a moment to have dimmed, in the faintest degree, the flame of her great love for him. Directly she arrived at the cottage at Three Mile Cross, she set about making it, what it soon became, one of the brightest and prettiest little homes that ever man entered; her cheery, energetic nature rather rejoicing than otherwise in the task. And later on in Dr. Mitford's life, when he had completely emptied his own pockets, his daughter refilled them willingly with her literary earnings.

Mrs. Mitford died some time before her husband, and father and daughter lived on for several years alone together. Her mother's loss was one of the few great griefs of Mary Mitford's life, for the close, intimate affection and entire confidence between the two had been more like the tie that joins sisters than that which unites in general parent and child. She struggled bravely, however, against her sorrow, and found relief for it in literary work, in redoubled devotion to her father, and in wider spreading sympathies which drew more and more friends towards her.

That cottage at Three Mile Cross shows a wondrously animated scene; a scene full of figures that rouse our love and interest, as we glance into it during the days when Mary Mitford and her father lived there together. Let us enter the trim garden, so brightly starred with flowers, one summer afternoon, and try for a moment to describe what we see there. We must tread carefully, or we shall disturb some of the many members of the canine family who are lying stretched at ease, or otherwise taking their pleasure on all sides, and shall call forth a whimper or a petulant growl, the sound of which will gain for us no favour in the eyes of the master and mistress of the place, with whom their pets are not animals, but regular personalities. There are dogs everywhere; in the garden, in the drawing-room, in attendance at the dinner-table. Two lovely Scotch terriers are gambling on the lawn, a greyhound is slumbering in the porch, a curly spaniel on the doorstep, a splendid deerhound is majestically taking a constitutional up and down the gravel walk. It is a perfect dogs' paradise, where all their whims are allowed full scope, and all their habits and customs respected.

But to turn from the dogs to the men and women present.

Here are two elderly gentlemen walking to and fro leisurely in the



sunshine. What a free, airy, jaunty bearing one of them has, in spite of his years; what grace there is in the upright carriage of his head; with what a springy step he moves; what a genial sunbeam there is in his glance; what wondrous sweetness in the handsome mouth. And yet the face of the gentleman in the clerical dress who is his companion, certainly inspires more feelings of reliance as we gaze at the friendly smile and calm, honest brow. When we look at Dr. Mitford, we cannot wonder that everybody loves him; but when we look at Mr. Harness, the clergyman, we cannot wonder that everybody trusts him. There is another gentleman not far off sauntering up and down with a book in his hand, a book over which he is now very intent, and now full of sly laughter that ripples over from eye and lip. This is Chorley, the journalist, and he is reading an unlucky book, on which to-morrow he is going to write a critique that will not be exactly all sugar.

But our attention soon wanders from the gentlemen to two ladies who are sitting on a garden bench hard by. There is singular matronly grace in the little figure of the elder of the pair, and there is singular brightness and sweetness, too, in her face, which is wondrously young and smooth, though the small lace cap proclaims that she must be somewhat advanced in years. Yet attractive though her appearance is, the eye is drawn, as with a spell, to her companion. Oh! let us gaze on and on into those delicate features, where heart and intellect seem married in such fair accord. Who would not be ready to live for that smile, to die for that glance? Who, in deepest sadness, could not but be soothed by listening to the melody of that voice? As we watch her and hear her, we do not marvel that she is to be the queenly moon of a poet's home, the mother of an artist, and that England is to count her as her greatest poetess, the girl, Elizabeth Barrett, who now sits beside her closest, and warmest, and almost motherly friend, Mary Russell Mitford.

It was a cruel tearing of her heart's tenderest fibres for Mary Mitford when her old father was taken away from her side. She did not wrap herself up, however, in a dark, heavy mantle of sorrow; she did not let her healthy interest in life and the commonplace, daily things of life grow pale and dim; such a course of action would have been completely foreign to her sympathetic, genial nature, in which the fountain of sweet waters never could grow dry. Her poorer neighbours basked in the sunshine of her free liberality; her dogs still frisked around her; her garden was still a rainbow of richly-blended colours; her little house was still the favourite rendezvous of all that was wisest, and brightest, and best in the land. Even now, dwellers in the neighbourhood of Three Mile Cross recollect the strings of carriages which used to besiege the charming old lady's modest gate on summer afternoons, when she gave her so-called "strawberry parties."

A few years before her death, Mary Mitford removed from Three

Mile Cross to Swallowfield, on account of the house she there took possession of being more comfortable. Here, as in the old home, it was all sunshine, all perfume in the atmosphere which surrounded her; even when age and infirmity began to creep upon her, she could never forget to be sympathetic and gracious. At length, after her health had been gently declining for some time, she passed calmly out of this life at the age of sixty-eight, leaving a name that we still love.

ALICE KING.



### LILIES ABLOOM!

LILIES abloom!

While the earth is heavy and wet with dew,  
And the darkness is not, or the light,  
And the west is red, and the east is blue,  
The one in a flame of day, and the other in shade of night!  
Lilies abloom!

Lilies abloom!

Standing upright in the shadows, all silver and gold,  
With a strange sweet breath, faint on the fainting wind,  
So white and sweet! Yet rooted deep in the mould,  
With a thousand clinging roots that in darkness and dust are twined!  
Lilies abloom!

Lilies abloom!

Passionless! dreamlike! wonderful! fit for a little child  
To worship and gaze at and wonder with strange surprise,  
Each one alike undefiled and fit for the undefiled,  
Born of the earth—and earth—yet that which the earth defies!  
Lilies abloom!

Lilies abloom!

Fit for sad eyes to see, beclouded with misty tears,  
And fit for the touch of heavy and fevered hands;  
When Death rules as a king over the barren years,  
And the roadway is rocky and rough that leads to the peaceful lands!  
Lilies abloom!

Lilies abloom!

Fit for the silent and still, a gift to the dead who rest,  
For the quiet of folded hands, for the eyes that open not;  
To lie for a pledge of life on a world-weary silent breast,  
For one who has hoped, and prayed, and died in the common lot!  
Lilies abloom!

T. S. CUNNINGHAM.

## ON AND OFF :

A STORY OF TWO WORLDLY PEOPLE.

BY VERA SINGLETON, AUTHOR OF "MY SATURDAYS."

## CHAPTER I.

MR. and Mrs. Chesney were honeymooning in the Isle of Wight. Having committed the ecclesiastical impropriety of being married in Lent, they were doing penance for it by futile endeavours to enjoy idling about in a British east wind. And as they had come to Ventnor in search of sun and shelter, they found the double pleasure of being baked when they loitered along the esplanade, or rested on the sunny seats with the invalids, and suddenly caught and scarified by the wind, when they grew tired of the hillside nest, and ventured inland, or walked boldly along the shingly or clayey beaches of the island.

Under this régime, the bride's complexion and the bridegroom's temper suffered about equally, and after a week it became rather hard work to keep up to the proper pitch of felicity. All the more that they had never professed to be deeply in love with each other, but had married for liking and convenience. Ada Lifford's father had been in the India Office, and accordingly his orphan daughter enjoyed a small pension until her marriage. She was taken care of by a rich widowed aunt, but, unluckily for herself, was rather fond of telling everyone that she was independent ; and as old Mrs. Lifford lived in every comfort, it was generally reported that Ada had a handsome income of her own, and would come in for all her aunt's money when she died.

Wilfrid Chesney had been a tolerably promising medical student, and had just taken out his licence to practise, without having learnt more mischief or less science than usual on the way to it, when he had the misfortune to be left a legacy of £4,000. He got drawn into speculative investments, and new companies ; lost money as a shareholder, and determined to have no more to do with any company in which he had no share in the management ; went into two new concerns, as director in one and secretary of another, and gave up his profession in order to devote his whole time to doubling his capital. The company of which he was secretary collapsed altogether, and that of which he was director did not prove a gold-mine as fast as was expected ; whereby it came to pass that three months before his marriage he had made the pleasing discovery that his balance at his banker's was £50, and that his most promising shares could not possibly bring in any dividend for a year.

There was nothing to be done for it but to marry someone with

money enough to buy him a practice, and give him a fresh start—for Wilfrid had no mind to go to the dogs, or to be called "Poor Chesney" by his friends. He and Ada met a few times at the houses of mutual acquaintances, who lived under pleasing delusions about the position of both parties; they liked each other fairly well, and Mrs. Lifford (who was in very weak health) was anxious to see Ada settled. Hence the present situation of affairs, and therefore are they sitting side by side on one of the benches near the sea, feeling tired and cross, and heartily sick of Ventnor, each wondering how long this sort of thing was going to last, and neither liking to be the first to say so.

"There!" said Ada, jumping up at last. "That miserable young man in the bath-chair has passed six times while we have been sitting here, and I can't stand seeing him a seventh. I hate sick men."

"I suppose men have to be sick sometimes as well as women," remarked her husband, rather gloomily. The speech was not a pleasant one to hear from his future ministering angel.

"Then they shouldn't wear scarlet knitted comforters, to make themselves look worse. And they should either get well or die, and not attempt to do the interesting invalid. It is only women that can play that part. Let us go in, do; I am tired of them all, men and women."

"Are you tired of Ventnor?" asked Wilfrid, seizing his chance. "Perhaps you would not care to stay here long?"

"Well, really, since you propose it, I think we might do better. I don't care for knocking about in hotels and trying to make holiday at this time of year, unless we could go quite south, to the Riviera or Naples."

"Suppose we have a regular business talk, then, and settle our plans—give up billing and cooing, and take to bills and counting?"

"We haven't been doing so very much of the billing and cooing," said Ada, with a little pout; "it doesn't seem in our line. I dare say the realities of life will suit us better."

Wilfrid did not see his way to reply to this accusation, so he told his wife, with an air of solicitude, that her dress was in the mud. It is odd that nothing annoys a woman like this kindly-meant warning: for your own sake you may just as well tread on her skirt and tear it, as remark to her that it is sweeping the street. Ada said "Bother!" picked up the offending fold, and walked on in silence.

On the table of their hotel sitting-room there lay a yellow envelope, directed to Mrs. Chesney. Ada tore it open, and read a bluntly-worded message from a servant, telling of her aunt's sudden death. She sat down, faint and shocked.

"When did it happen, dear?" said her husband, putting his arm round her.

"This morning, quite early," she answered, tearfully. "Oh, I can't believe it. Poor aunt; she was very kind to me."

"Well, love, she has left you with someone to be kinder to you, I hope. I am sorry for the poor old lady, since you were fond of her. I suppose I ought to go to the funeral."

"Of course you ought," said Ada, gratified by the little bit of love-making. "There can't be any hurry, though."

"I'll telegraph to them to let us know all arrangements at once," he said, glad to have something to do. "Cheer up, dear; you're not alone in the world now, as you would have been if she'd died three months ago." He kissed her and strode out, thankful to be able to light a cigar, and to have got away from her tears without showing any annoyance at them. On the whole, he felt he had come through a severe trial very well. He had been affectionate and sympathetic with his wife, he had not resented her crying over her aunt, he had spoken properly of the old lady, he was going to see her buried—though he hated funerals, and he was fully determined not to ask a question about the will. For which reticence he indemnified himself by calculations. Mrs. Lifford had kept a snug villa, three maids, and a man to look after the horse and brougham, a nice garden and greenhouse, had given away money handsomely, and liked good dinners.

"She never did it on less than £1,000," he soliloquised, "and cheap at that. More likely twelve hundred. Hope the capital isn't tied up. I'd rather get a lump sum down, and buy a practice, than live on my wife's income. I should only burn my fingers again, dabbling in speculations with a few hundreds, and be always something to the bad. It will be better for me to have something to do, and with money in hand I can start a decent house and a brougham at once, and do the thing properly. It's a very lucky thing for me, and that's a fact; there's no use in humbugging. Old women have got to die; she was a decent old body, and no doubt she's better off. So am I; so there are two of us, and all's for the best."

In this genial mood he prolonged his stroll and his meditations, and returned to the hotel in about an hour. Matters were looking more cheerful there also. Ada had done crying, and ordered some tea; there was a good fire, and Wilfrid sat down by it, and took his cup, determined to continue to tread in the paths of virtue, go on sympathising with his wife, and not say a word about the will. But fate was too strong for him.

"I was thinking," Ada began, "that as soon as we have had letters in answer to your telegram, we had better go quietly up to town. I shall want to get some mourning at once. It is a great pity, when all my things are new; but then, it is such an inconvenient time of year that I didn't get much. One can't buy summer things in March, you know."

"I suppose not," Wilfrid answered vaguely, wondering whether he had enough money to pay the hotel bill.

"And very likely there will be arrangements about the funeral for



you to see to. Dear aunt left directions in her will, I know, as to what she wished done; for she often told me that it should be opened before anything was decided."

"Did she tell you how she left her property?" The words slipped out before he knew that they were coming.

"Oh, she had scarcely anything to leave, you know. She may have put by a little for legacies to the servants, and so on; and there is the silver and the pictures; but all her money goes to my cousin, John Lifford, at her death."

"What!"

"You seem surprised. Were you calculating on its coming to me? You made a mistake then; she had only a life-interest in her property."

"I always understood you were to be her heir?"

"You did not understand it from me; I am sure I never said a word about it. Did you marry me for money?"

"Certainly I did not marry you for money; but I could not have married you if you had not had money."

"Why, haven't you enough for us both?"

"No, indeed. I shall have plenty by-and-bye, when my shares begin to pay; but the plain truth is that at present, if I have as much cash as will pay our bill here, it is all that I can muster."

"And what are we to do?"

"I am afraid we must manage upon your income for a year, and then we shall be all right."

"But my pension was only £50 a year, and it stopped when I was married."

"The deuce!"

Ada burst into tears. Wilfrid walked up and down the room furiously, biting his moustache in savage disappointment, and holding his tongue with difficulty. At last, he flung out of the room, and walked out into the chilly March dusk. He walked for miles and miles, tiring down his rage, and partly succeeded. His mind was all in a turbid whirl at first, in which he knew only that all the world had been in a conspiracy to delude him. Gradually it cleared a little, and he began to recognise how far he had been self-deceived. Ada had told him no untruths, that was clear; it was all the doing of those meddling, chattering fools who had told him that she had a fortune, and he had been double-dyed idiot enough to believe them, and hurry to secure it without knowing what he was about. In this fashion, with endless reiteration and far more emphatic mental expressions, he abused himself and his acquaintances, until he found himself in the outskirts of Newport, having walked nearly across the island. Here he suddenly discovered that he was dead tired, with the excitement and the furious pace at which he had walked; and that it was long past dinner-time. So he looked for a respectable hotel, ordered dinner, and found that his misfortunes did not prevent him from eating it when it came.

Dinner put a different complexion on matters, as it always does; and by the time that Wilfrid Chesney had finished his dinner, and stretched out his feet to the coffee-room fire, it began again to seem possible that life was not altogether a delusion, and that every hopeful path might not prove a cul-de-sac, in which you must end by knocking your head against a dead wall.

This more cheerful view of things was confirmed by their further course. One or two men dropped into the hotel smoking-room, whom he had met here and there, and exchanged a few words with; he fell into chat with them and their acquaintances, cards were sent for, and Nap. became the order of the evening. Wilfrid had a few sovereigns in his pocket, and was in the humour to be reckless; but his play was good, and his luck was steady. Shillings soon run into pounds at that very immoral game; the other players grew excited, and raised the points, but Wilfrid kept his head and his luck. When he drove back to Ventnor that night in one of the hotel flies, he had no longer any anxiety about the bill, nor indeed about anything else. When a man can make twenty guineas in an evening's amusement, why need he care for any old woman's leavings? In whatever fashion Ada had spent the evening, she was sound asleep when he arrived; and so peace and downy slumber sealed up the cataclysmic day which ended the Chesneys' honeymoon.

## CHAPTER II.

MRS. LIFFORD'S will proved somewhat to exceed Ada's expectations. She had left her niece residuary legatee; and as she had few debts, a good balance at her banker's, and some small investments, it appeared that when the other legacies were paid, Ada would come in for a couple of hundred pounds in cash, a good many spoons and forks, a genuine Teniers (representing two Dutch boors drinking in a cloud of tobacco-smoke), and a dubious Turner, representing thumb-smudges and sunset glory; besides an annual income from railway shares of twenty-seven pounds ten, as long as the island of Cuba maintained its usual peaceful and prosperous condition. This was so much more than Wilfrid had expected, when he had once fallen from his heights of happy anticipation, that he grew quite jubilant, and was rather surprised that his wife did not seem to share his good spirits. In fact, he did not understand her at all. She treated him in a polite and friendly way, but never now seemed to expect to be made love to, or gave him any opening for doing it, if he had been inclined. They went at once to Mrs. Lifford's house, and she occupied herself in looking over stores, clothes, &c., and in making all the arrangements for the break-up of the establishment. Wilfrid did his duty manfully in moving heavy things for her, and nailing up boxes; and he it was who sold the Teniers, and fought

many a battle over the Turner. But he was a good deal puzzled at finding that suggestions about keeping this or that little knickknack to adorn their own future quarters fell flat; Ada went on steadily packing up everything for sale, and would not be drawn into any talk about what was to come next. Her husband wondered what on earth she was up to, but thought he might as well let her alone until the legacy was paid, and it was necessary to decide something.

His own reflections were often the reverse of cheerful. They had some money in hand, and Ada's legacy would soon be coming in, as Mrs. Lifford's affairs were simple, and her executor prompt. But it was only a plank between them and that sea of poverty which is so salt on the lips and so heavy on the limbs of those who carry weight. Wilfrid had not yet felt its actual touch, but he dreaded the cold plunge. Ada, he owned to himself, was the difficulty. If he were alone, he could go as a ship's doctor, try his luck at the diggings, or turn army surgeon. There was no reason why *he* should not be jolly enough; but to drag a wife about the world, and see her growing shabby and sickly and spiritless!

"What a fool I have been!" thought Wilfrid, dolefully. "But I'm in for it now, and I've got to stick to it. I fancy the army is the least altogether intolerable chance, but with a wife it will be just genteel starvation. And if I must have the starvation, I'd rather of the two have it cold without. The gentility, which is supposed to be the sweetener, seems to me just the one thing wanting to make every step down worse than the catastrophe itself."

Matters came to a point at last. The carpets dolefully cumbered the ground which once they covered, in huge bales that seemed to be always in the way; the ottomans had donned canvas surtouts; and the chairs had lost their sociable individuality, and stood in rank, or stacked up one on the other, waiting for the van that was to swallow them up. The Chesneys sat by the fire in one of the two rooms they used, which alone remained comparatively habitable, and then at last Ada opened her mouth.

"I'm horribly tired, but I think I've done a good day's work."

"Rather," responded her husband. "Only about enough to kill two strong men, and most of it totally unnecessary."

"Because you want me to leave everything to the servants, and a nice mess they would have made of it. In the end you will always find it is twice as much trouble not to see to things yourself."

"Oh, no doubt. Only I think that when you have told a woman twice what she is to do, it is more satisfactory to pitch into her for not doing it than to stand over her and see it done. But if you like that way of amusing yourself, my dear, do it by all means."

"Amusing myself!" echoed Ada, with high disdain. "But it is not worth while to argue about that, we have more important things to talk about."

"Well, I think so myself. I don't know that I have gone to the

ant, and been wise ; but even the most improvident of men likes to have an idea where he is going to sleep to-morrow night."

"And have you no ideas on your own account?"

"Plenty, but I've been waiting for you to emerge from your aunt's boxes before I could propound them. One does not feel encouraged to discuss one's future destinies, when the partner of them lives with her head in a cupboard."

"I don't know that I feel encouraged to be the partner of your future destinies."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Do you think your prospects are cheerful?"

"I don't see that they are so bad. We've got something in hand, and something coming in, and I bring home something every evening I get a game. We can go into lodgings for a little, and look about us. I think of going into the army. They haven't enough men for their vacancies now, so there will be no trouble. You would like a military life, wouldn't you?"

"When we had to live on your pay! It would be simply genteel starvation."

"I suppose that must be the word for it, for it's exactly what had occurred to myself. But what else is there for us? We may as well put the best face we can on it."

"Yes, there is something else for us."

"What, then?"

"Separation."

Wilfrid jumped up from his chair with a force that knocked it down, and began to walk about. Ada, having launched her torpedo, stitched nervously at some wretched little bit of work, rather frightened about the effect.

"You don't mean that?" he said presently, stopping at the mantel-piece again.

"I do," she replied, growing bolder; and she laid down her work and looked at him. "The poverty, and the worry, and the wretched struggle of keeping up appearances all belong to our keeping together. Each of us can get on much better alone. You would do very well in the army without a wife. I have a little money, I have friends, and I have wits; I can support myself."

"And what about getting married, and taking each other for better for worse?"

"Why, you know we never meant it in the least. We agreed to take each other for worse, because we were quite sure that it would turn out for better. That was a condition understood. It has not been fulfilled; and circumstances alter cases."

"Well, you *are* the coolest little piece of goods I ever heard of!" declared Wilfrid, half angry and half amused. There was Ada proposing the straight course out of all the ignominious miseries which had been afflicting his imagination, and yet he was vexed with her

for proposing it, and in no hurry to take it. To be sure, no man cares to be jilted by his own wife.

"There's no use in being anything but cool. Besides, I have been thinking it over a great deal, and I have talked to Mr. Burdon about it." Mr. Burdon was Mrs. Lifford's lawyer.

"The deuce you have! You're in a hurry to get rid of your bad bargain. And what will become of your precious plan if I hold to my rights, and say that I choose to keep my wife with me?"

"Why should you?" asked Ada quietly, looking straight at him, as he stood angrily twisting his moustache.

"Why should I?" he echoed loudly. "Because—because—— Why should I want my wife to live with me? What a question for any woman to ask!" He began walking up and down again, and there was a minute's pause. Then he laughed awkwardly. "Why should I? Upon my word I don't know."

"You aren't going to say that you are in love with me?"

"Might as well be in love with a dissecting-knife at present, it seems to me."

"And I never professed to be in love with you. I don't know whether the sort of thing one reads about in books would make it tolerable to knock about the world always poor and miserable, but I am very sure that nothing else can. You would lose your temper, and I should lose my looks. We should come to hate each other."

"A pleasing picture," muttered Wilfrid to his moustache.

"We've made a mistake, and the best thing we can do is to undo it as far as possible. We shall have a pleasanter remembrance of each other if we say good-bye next week, than if we fret and quarrel through twenty years."

Somehow the little bit of sentiment about saying good-bye touched Ada's feelings, and she began to cry. Those tears did more than all her arguments. She looked ugly when she was crying—nearly all women do, by-the-bye—and Wilfrid hated to see it. He took a few more turns, and then sat down facing her, in a business-like fashion.

"Now, look here, Ada: after the way you've been talking, you're far too sensible to go on crying when I'm ready to talk business. I should never have thought of what you have proposed; I have married you, and I'm willing to stick to you, and do my best to maintain you in whatever way I can. But it's true that it's likely to be a very poor way, and if you think that you can do better for yourself, I don't feel that I have a right to hinder you."

"I think of you as well as myself," put in Ada. "It will be best for us both."

"I don't deny that. Of course I shall be freer alone, and have a better chance of getting work. What I don't like is your going out on the world by yourself. But remember it is your own choice."

"Yes," she said, meekly.

"I'll have no lawyer sticking in his oar. I've got nothing to settle



on you, and no money to allow you. But if I get any you shall have some."

"Not unless I can't manage for myself," she said. "I mean to."

"I'll give you an address where you can send letters for me, if you want to. But I'm a bad hand at writing."

"That's a half-and-half way of doing things," said Ada. "It would keep us always unsettled. I mean to support myself, and there is no use in keeping up a correspondence. When we say good-bye, you must forget me. I'm only sorry that I can't set you free to marry somebody with a real fortune," she added, with a touch of spite.

"You seem bent on reconciling me to your plan," he retorted, stormily. But you shall have your way. You choose not to be my wife, and you shall not. I won't write to you, I won't hear of you; if I see you on the other side of the street, I won't cross it to speak to you. You've made your bed, and you may lie on it; and you can begin to-night. I'm going to the Club."

"I never would have done it, Wilfrid," she cried after him, "if you had loved me."

"Bother! You needn't begin with sentiment now," he said, roughly, as she followed him down the noisy carpetless stairs. "It's rather too late in the day for that."

"I won't be sentimental; but, Wilfrid, let us part friends."

"Oh, of course. We aren't enemies, but as for anything else, the less said about it the better," he answered, desperately plunging into his coat.

She helped him into it. "Good-bye, Wilfrid," she said, looking at him, wistfully.

He caught her in his arms, and kissed her.

"Good-bye, Ada. I—I hope you will never be sorry for this."

The hall-door clanged, and sent its echoes rattling along the bare staircase and the deserted rooms. Ada took her empty heart back to the fireplace, and there, crouched in a heap on the hearthrug, she sobbed again and again:

"I never, never would have done it, if he had only loved me!"

#### CHAPTER III.

A CLOUDLESS sky and a sapphire sea, of a deeper blue than Mediterranean waters. An amphitheatre of roofs, slated or red-tiled, accented here and there by turrets and towers and church-spires, looking down upon a large harbour well filled with yachts and fishing-vessels, held safe within the long fingers of great white breakwaters. At the point of the longest of these, brandished defiantly at the distant coast of France, a queer old castle upon a tiny island, which once proudly protected the town behind it, but now would not furnish an hour's amusement to a gunboat. Prince Albert in cast-

iron, patronising the pier from a granite pedestal. A semi-foreign, semi-English town, quaint and picturesque once, now modernised till there is scarcely a sketchable bit in it; yet not quite spoilt, and keeping its individuality still. Guernsey. And here it is that we shall again meet our friends, the Chesneys.

One of them, at least, is visible now; for the fair little lady in black, walking along the pier beside a bath-chair, is certainly Ada. Two years have passed since she and Wilfrid parted, and they seem to have done her good rather than harm. She was merely good-looking then, but she is pretty now. Her black (of that type which may be either mourning or choice, and commits the wearer to nothing) is becoming to her, and she seems to be in capital health. Just at present she looks mildly and politely bored, as she goes on coining remarks for the benefit of an old gentleman in the bath-chair; but some boredom is the lot of most people in this world, and whatever has fallen to her share seems to have agreed with her. The invalid whom she has in charge is a gentle-looking, yellow-faced man, well on the other side of sixty.

"Shall we go out on the North Arm now, Mr. Plympton," she asks, "or would you rather have the chair drawn into the shade for a little? I am afraid the heat is rather too much for you."

"My head aches a good deal," he answered in a mild plaintive voice, "and the glare is rather trying. But we mustn't complain, must we? If I don't like the sun, I can go into the shade; and that is more than those poor fellows at work out there can do." He nodded at a group of labourers engaged on some of the never-ending finishings which the new pier seemed to be always requiring.

"Well, let us go into the shade, then," said Ada, thinking to herself that if she could cart stones she would not envy anyone who was wheeled in a bath-chair. Accordingly, they turned to the group of shrubs planted below what is known as the Fort Hill, on the top of which are the barracks.

"We should always look on the bright side, shouldn't we?" continued Mr. Plympton. "Now, there are those poor fellows, roasted in the sun, toiling beyond their strength, perhaps, for their wives and children. They were up and at work long before I left my bed this morning, and they must not leave off to sit and cool in this nice, refreshing shade. The heat and the labour make them thirsty, and so they go into the public-house and spend their hard-earned wages on liquor; and then I, who have been doing nothing but make myself comfortable all day, call them drunkards, and sentence them to prison. I am ashamed of myself."

Ada glanced towards the victims. The only one whom she could see was sitting on the shaft of a cart, with his cap off, smoking a pipe.

"Isn't that looking very much on the dark side?" she said. "This sort of life is what those men have been used to; they don't feel it as you would. I don't think they look as if they minded the heat at

all ; whereas, you know, it really does upset you. And I am sure you never sentence anybody to anything, except me to go to bed when I want to sit up with you."

"I did when I was a magistrate," he replied, shaking his head sorrowfully over the memories of his Rhadamanthine past. "It was hard to know what to do ; because, you know, when they got drunk they used to beat their wives. One had to give them a lesson sometimes. But I generally paid their fines myself," he added, brightening up again.

"And these Guernsey labourers need not get drunk unless they choose," suggested Ada. "They can get temperance drinks at the coffee-house close by."

"So they can, so they can," Mr. Plympton assented. "But the soldiers at drill can't. What a day for marching about in the open field, dressed up tightly in heavy cloth uniforms ! I suppose poor Freddy is doing that now. I do hope the dear boy will not get a sun-stroke ; he looks strong, but I have no faith in his constitution. And he takes no care of his health. Of course, a young man with a profession can't fad about himself all day as I do," he ended, with a gentle sigh.

Ada was accustomed to these self-upbraidings, and knew that to establish Mr. Plympton in his own good opinion was a hopeless task. At this moment, however, she caught sight of a figure descending the winding paths which led down the face of the hill from Fort George to the pier.

"I do believe that is he coming down now," she exclaimed. "Look, Mr. Plympton ; here are your lorgnettes."

"What good eyes you have, my dear ! To make him out at all that distance ! What it is to be young ! But I mustn't complain. I had my youth once, and I am afraid I made a very bad use of it. Yes, it is Freddy. I hope he won't slip ; that path is so steep."

In a few minutes the object of all these solitudes was by their side, a plump, red-faced, extremely jovial youth of about three-and-twenty, who looked more than equal to the task of taking care of himself.

"Hallo, uncle, how d'ye do ? Good morning, Mrs. Chesney. Saw you from the top, and thought I'd have a scud down, to see how you were enjoying yourselves this fine day. Jolly weather, isn't it ?"

"Very fine, dear boy ; but we thought you would find it hot at your drill."

"Well, it wasn't exactly cool, but it might be hotter. Bless you, I don't mind if it does take me down a bit, it's good for my figure. You graceful creatures who have nothing to lose must take care of yourselves."

"So we have been doing," said Ada ; "this is a nice place to sit."

"Are you too much in love with it to leave it ?" asked Freddy. "Because there's a splendid yacht coming into the roads, and I

want to have a look at her. I fancy I know her cut. I'm just going out to the North Arm to see her come in. You come along, too, uncle, and I'll hold your white umbrella over you. She's worth looking at."

Mr. Plympton would have been wheeled into a furnace to please Freddy; and after all, the North Arm was not a furnace, though the sun was very powerful; for a fresh breeze was blowing from the sea, and bringing in the yacht in question. Accordingly, they left their retirement, and passed again the party of labourers who had already excited his compassion. One of them was mopping his head.

"Poor man," said Mr. Plympton; "how hot he does look! Oh, stop, please, Smith. Freddy, do go down and give those poor men half-a-crown from me to get a drink at the coffee-house—at the coffee-house, mind. No, perhaps you'd better tell them that they can get the worth of it there, and I'll pay as we pass it."

"Uncle," remonstrated Freddy, gravely, "where are your principles? Isn't it my duty to do as I would be done by?"

"Why, yes, of course; but ——"

"And do you think that I would have any fellow come and mock me with offers to treat me to lemonade and cold tea? I couldn't do it, uncle; I shouldn't have the face. If it were champagne, now, with a lump of ice in it,—or brandy-and-seltzer, or even shandy-gaff, my conscience might sanction the act."

"To be sure, shandy-gaff could not do them much harm," said Mr. Plympton irresolutely.

"They could not get it without going to a public-house," said Ada. "Your plan is much the best, Mr. Plympton; and as *my* conscience is not on the side of brandy-and-seltzer, I'll carry it out, if you'll just give me your card and the half-crown."

Freddy perceived that he was to consider himself snubbed, and when Ada returned from transacting the affair, he wore an air of the deepest dejection. In ostentatious silence, he walked beside his uncle to the end of the pier, and there they stopped, and looked out to sea. In front of them stretched the blue waters of the roadstead, sparkling here and there with little points of light, as wavelet after wavelet danced and dipped in the sunshine. On the other side lay two green islands, side by side, Herm and Jethou; a stretch of yellow beach gleamed there, little white houses sunned themselves, and sharp brown rocks ran out into the sea at the ends. Between the two appeared the sea again, "wine-dark" there, and bordered by a misty vision of the coast of France. Further back, to the right, rose the long range of cliffs which builds up the island of Sark,—brown and green, softened into a shade of lilac by the distance, and the summer haze, and the blue and purple reflections of the water; and on the horizon lay a narrow gray band of cloud, which was Jersey. It was a lovely scene—it would be hard to find a lovelier; Ada leant on the wall, and gazed at it in silence. She was not wont to be wrought

upon by Nature, but to-day the mighty mother was too strong for her. The sun kissed the sea; and the sea laughed up at him, and tossed its skimming sea-gulls to their play, and cradled all its lazy islands, and softly nursed its fretting rocks. The gladness of it, and the brightness, and the peace, suddenly forced the looker-on to a sense of contrast. Was *she* happy? Oh, she was comfortable enough; she had everything she wanted, money for her needs, all the luxuries of life, easy duties, nothing but kindness. Is there nothing better than this? insisted the little waves that splashed round the big buoy,—nothing better, nothing better? They made a sort of refrain of it, and splashed it out again and again.

"What should I want better?" Ada asked herself petulantly. "I never went in for sentiment."

The sea murmured on, and the sun shone still upon it. They seemed to be waiting for her answer. "We are happy: are you?"

"I don't suppose anyone is absolutely happy," she thought. "If they are, I never met them. No, I'm not very happy. What does it matter? I get on very well; but, no, I'm not happy at all."

Two sea-gulls were chasing each other up and down the waves, rising and falling, gliding in the air and resting in the water, but always keeping near each other. "They look happy, at any rate," thought poor Ada. And then, curiously, there came into her mind some words heard long ago in a common hotel sitting-room: "Cheer up, dear, you're not alone in the world now."

"I am alone," she answered, "all alone, quite alone in the world." And her tears dropped upon the great stones of the harbour wall.

"There she comes," cried Freddy, tired of standing on his dignity. "Isn't she a beauty?"

A splendid schooner yacht was sliding in between the islands; and as they looked, her great sails dropped, and she rocked idly outside the harbour.

"It is the *Wild Swan*. I was sure I knew the cut of her. It's Lord Clitheroe's: a capital fellow is Clitheroe: met him at Gib. Lady C.'s wretchedly delicate; he's always taking her about somewhere for change of air, or warm climate, or something—generally with a tame doctor to look after her. Awful bore, I should think."

"Ah!" said Mr. Plympton; "how sad that is! A young creature, with every luxury, and all the world smiling on her, not able to enjoy anything. It's natural for old people to be ailing and poorly; and they ought to take it so, and not be for ever grumbling and fretting, and making themselves a nuisance. But a young thing like that—a countess, too—with a devoted husband—dear me! dear me!"

"Dear Mr. Plympton," said Ada, "you are the most inveterate grumbler for other people I ever knew. Why don't you grumble a little for yourself, by way of a change? If Lady Clitheroe has every luxury, and a devoted husband, she ought to be the better able to bear her ill-health."



"Ah, my dear," he answered, "you don't know."

"No," said Ada, "I don't; that's true." And somehow she found the tears so near her eyes again, that she had to turn away to hide them. Poor Mr. Plympton was inexpressibly distressed.

"My dear, my dear," he entreated, "don't cry. It was so thoughtless of me; I don't know how I could have said such a thing, to remind you of your troubles. Just like me—always inconsiderate."

"Hem," meditated Freddy. "Never thought that jolly little woman could cry. I suppose these tears are a tribute to the memory of the late lamented Chesney. It's the first hint I've heard of his existence."

"Never mind," said Ada, turning round brightly, "it was not your fault. It was my own thoughts that upset me; not anything that you said. I don't know what made me so horribly sentimental; forget it, please. They are lowering a boat from the *Wild Swan* now; perhaps you will see your friend, Mr. Whipple." (I ought before this to have introduced Freddy in form as Frederick Plympton Whipple, Esq., lieutenant in the ——th Artillery.)

"In a hurry for his letters, no doubt. Yes, by Jove, there he is; and I bet that other chap with him in the boat is the doctor. I'll run round to the steps and shake hands with him. By-bye, Uncle. Good-bye, Mrs. Chesney."

Ada scarcely noticed his farewell. There was something strangely familiar about the figure of one of the two men who sat in the stern of the approaching boat, which made her heart beat fast. She could not see the face at first, but she never had a doubt of what she should see. Sheltering her own with her parasol, she leant forward on the wall, and peeped from under. She had not been mistaken; it was her husband; and to her own extreme surprise, she felt an intense joy. There he was, once more before her, after so many months; and she who had sent him away from her was utterly delighted to see him again. But she had no mind that he should see her, and keeping her glowing face well behind the hood of Mr. Plympton's chair, she proposed to go home.

Mr. Plympton's penitence for his unfortunate remark was such that he was prepared to accede to any wish of hers; so they went straight towards their lodgings, avoiding the steps, on which Wilfrid Chesney was just setting his foot.

(To be concluded.)

## MONSIEUR MICHAUD'S FIANCÉE.

BY ESME STUART.

**M**ONSIEUR MICHAUD lived in Paris. Not the Paris known to rich English and Americans who drive up the Champs Elysées and ride in the Bois de Boulogne, dine at a famous restaurant, and take their café noir at the Palais Royal. Quite another kind of Paris, which foreigners know nothing of, and where the real heart of middle-class life palpitates and struggles, trying to work itself into a state of calm prosperity, through byeways never suspected by strangers who do not cross the Seine to plunge into a narrow street nearly parallel with the Rue du Bac.

Only in Paris would there be men like Monsieur Michaud to be found. He was a bachelor, verging towards the far side of middle age, very ugly, and living alone in a small apartment in a tall, narrow house, with a spiral staircase. Madame Joliet, who lived just one stage above M. Michaud, came and attended to his ménage, and smiled as women will smile at bachelor eccentricities, chatting to him meanwhile, poor soul, about the hardship of life and the difficulty of getting enough money for herself and Georgette. Monsieur Michaud always listened good-naturedly, paid regularly for her labour, and was delighted when the door shut behind madame again, and he murmured, contentedly :

"Ah, ciel! quelles sont bavardes, ces femmes. Not that her Georgette is like her in that, or I should hear her. No, Georgette is not like the other woman's daughter below. What a chattering magpie, a brainless piece of goods *she* is."

It must not be thought that M. Michaud did not possess the characteristic French politeness. On the contrary, he was *very* polite, and to her face the "woman below" was madame; but when alone he consoled himself with unadorned truth.

Georgette worked at something: all the demoiselles in this house did, except the one who occupied the rez de chaussée, and she turned up her nose at the others as they daily descended the corkscrew staircase and hurried away to various shops, or places where franks were to be made by very patient toil.

Georgette was one of these; and every morning her light step could be heard just touching each stair with the gentlest footfall, and yet with a certain decision of character. But her face had something more than character in it; it was a thin face, with large, penetrating grey eyes, which now and then seemed to sparkle; but only on occasions when she felt great joy or sorrow. A low, broad forehead, delicate Roman nose, and a mouth with so much and

such varying expression, that description is impossible. Looking at Georgette, one instinctively coiled up her hair over a cushion, powdered it, gave her a fichu à-la-Marie Antoinette, and fancied her going to the scaffold with raised head and half pathetic, half scornful expression. This was purely imaginative, nothing so tragical ever befell Georgette, her hair was just brushed off her delicate temples, and instead of the scaffold she merely went daily to Madame Bertine. This lady made head-dresses, and was in no way connected with a guillotine.

Sometimes, however, the illusion might have been almost perfected, for Georgette occasionally said half aloud, as she neared the Bertine establishment, and thought of those she must associate with all day, "Mais! quel supplice!" Georgette was very young for such an exclamation, but she felt she was made for better things, and that if she had only been somebody else, somewhere else, she would not have been found day after day at Madame Bertine's. This discontented feeling had begun years before: when Georgette was about twelve years old, her mother had taken her to a free representation at the "Français," and there she had seen a little piece, entitled "On ne badine pas avec l'amour." The girl had sobbed so loud that someone had angrily said "Hush!"

"Maman, I could do that; I could act like that, because I could feel it all real," she said when they came out. "It was real, wasn't it?"

"But no, little silly one, it was only la comédie."

Nevertheless it was real to Georgette, and from that day she knew she could act if her mother would let her. But Madame Joliet had no artistic ideas; Georgette should earn her livelihood with her needle in a respectable manner, and not go among a set of actresses whose characters were, according to madame, always doubtful. Was it likely that an honest and respectable widow should listen to her only child's longing for the stage?

That was all the history of Georgette's life, and young as she was, and with that wonderful face, she just sighed, "quel supplice," when she stepped over the threshold at Madame Bertine's.

One winter's evening Monsieur Michaud had settled himself very comfortably in his arm-chair, near his white-tiled stove; the "Figaro" lay on his knees, but he himself was just then meditating on his past history. Most of his friends had forgotten him, and they had never guessed that Gustave Michaud had had a history at all. After all, it was a common one—a bad-tempered father who had driven his wife into a madhouse, and had thwarted his only son's inclination to marry a pretty, gentle girl for love. She never guessed that money, or rather the want of it, had made her Madame Acard instead of Madame Michaud, or that cruel fate had killed M. Michaud père on her wedding day, making his son a man with enough money to live on, but with no interest in life. He gave up his profession, society, and

friends; and settled down in that out-of-the-way street, cultivating a hard exterior, but unable to get rid of that one warm place in his heart which love for Julie had kindled. Now he had reached a stage in life when he could think of Julie without bitterness.

Suddenly a light hasty ring at his tinkling little door bell made him start as if he had been caught in the act of doing something he was ashamed of. Crossing two small rooms to reach his door, he opened it, and held his lamp so that the light fell upon the intruder.

It was Georgette; her face strangely altered, her hands clasped nervously together, her grey eyes kindled with suppressed feeling.

"Mdlle. Georgette! What is the matter?"

"Oh, M. Michaud, we have no friend but you. Will you come and see my mother? I think she is dying, and she moans out your name."

"M. Michaud was not over-pleased to hear this; still he followed Georgette without more ado. The Doctor had been sent for, and was certainly the only man necessary for this occasion, thought M. Michaud to himself, as he stood by Madame's bed-side. She had only just strength to motion her daughter away; and but one wish to mention to M. Michaud before going to another existence, where there would be no anxiety how to keep herself and Georgette in respectable poverty. But then—and here was her difficulty—Georgette would have to keep up the struggle alone.

"Monsieur, will you be kind to Georgette, for the love of your mother? She is my only child; and she must not be as are many other friendless girls in Paris—rather may God take her, too. You understand, M. Michaud?"

M. Michaud found himself suddenly in a very strange position; it was the last thing he had thought of to have the care of a young girl thrust on him; though certainly even the little he knew of her made him aware that Georgette was not quite like other girls.

"But—" he began, hesitatingly.

"But, Monsieur, you are so kind—you have a good heart. Think if Georgette were your child, left alone in Paris! She is a good child, only not quite liking common work, and that may lead her astray."

Suffice it to say, that before Madame died M. Michaud had accepted the charge. He would be good to Georgette, and keep an eye on her: but he did not then realise what this meant! When he had arranged that Georgette should lodge with the Madame below, and that what she could not pay he would be answerable for, he fancied he had fulfilled his promise. He found out his mistake.

In the first place Georgette's face would come between him and his "Figaro" when he sat by his stove. Not that she at all reminded him of his long-lost meek-eyed Julie; but yet those grey, earnest eyes haunted him strangely. Sometimes he was impelled to go and ask after Mdlle. Georgette; and when she expressed her thanks in her earnest way, he felt he had really done nothing to deserve them.

There was no great harm in this ; and M. Michaud was quite happy to let things go on in this manner ; he had money, and he did not miss the little he spent on Georgette. However, one day, when spring was beginning to make Paris look beautiful, suggesting new life and new hopes, M. Michaud had a surprise. It was not an agreeable one. He often took his constitutional walk across the Tuileries, because it was a pleasant place, and it was not his fault that it was also Georgette's shortest way home. This spring afternoon, as he sat down on a seat watching the girls skipping and the boys racing, he kept his eye also on the steps down which Georgette must come ; but when he did see her, he almost started, for there was something strange in her expression.

"Bon jour, Mdle. Georgette ; did not you see me ?" he called out, whilst his ugly grotesque face beamed upon the girl so pleasantly that she did not notice its want of beauty.

"No, Monsieur," she answered ; "but I was thinking of you. I was wondering how I should manage to see you. May I sit down and talk to you ?"

"Yes, yes ; tell me what you like, Georgette. Your mother ——"

"Don't mention her. Look here, M. Michaud, I can't help it ; I have tried so hard to like it—the hats and bonnets—but I can't. I must leave them, because I can do something better ; it is in me ; I am sure it is. Do you understand, M. Michaud ?"

No, M. Michaud did not understand. Was the child a little off her head ? "No, indeed, Mdle. Georgette ; I don't know what you mean. Are you complaining of Madame Bertine's bonnets ? She is, I believe, as honest as other women of her occupation.

"Bah !" said Georgette impatiently. "I beg your pardon, M. Michaud, but I know you cannot understand ; only do try to believe that it isn't fancy. I must go on the stage ; I must act ; I feel it is all here," touching her forehead. "It is stronger than I."

M. Michaud gave a low whistle. How was he to look after Georgette on the stage ?—he had long ago given up going to theatres. One was stifled within them and caught cold coming out. Besides —an actress !

"Would your mother like this, Mdle. Georgette ?" The girl turned away her face and was silent ; then she seized M. Michaud's hand.

"My mother was good, very good, but she could not understand *that* feeling. She was angry when I mentioned it, but she knows everything now ; she knows I have tried to get over it and I can't. You are my only friend ; help me."

It so happened that in old days M. Michaud had known a clever actor who, having made a name and a fortune, was now director of a theatre : for the sake of past friendship, he might perhaps try Georgette. But then—after that ?

"It's a bad life, Georgette," he said, sternly and paternally. I don't feel that I ought to help you with this strange idea. Won't



you think better of it? Try dresses, my child, if bonnets are dull; try anything rather than the theatre." Then, shyly, the bachelor added, "The life is not fitted for such as you, Georgette."

"It has temptations, I know," said Georgette simply, "but so has any life here in Paris, and my mother brought me up to take care of myself. Ah! she was good, and if I could crush the wish I would."

Georgette got round M. Michaud of course, and when he let out that he knew M. Roche, it was all over with him. The girl calmed down when he promised to hunt out the director, and putting her small hand into his, spoke earnestly:

"How shall I ever repay your kindness?"

"Tut, tut," he answered. "But tell me, Georgette, what was your father like; do you remember him?" He was thinking that she could not have inherited her face and her character from commonplace, honest Madame Joliet.

"My father—oh no; he was a painter. He died of failure. Yes, I believe failure in everything killed him."

## II.

"*Ma foi*, Michaud? No offence meant, but really I fancied you were buried years ago! It's like seeing my grandfather walk out of his grave. As to the girl you speak of, we have a dozen every week of such prodigies; they crop up like mushrooms. I know their tale by heart now: they feel a vocation for the stage—have been complimented by everybody, &c. I used to believe them when I first began, but now my answer is, I am sure you would be *prima donna*, *Mademoiselle*, but we are full."

"I am really delighted to hear you say this," said M. Michaud. "It's a bad life for a young girl like *Mdlle. Georgette*; no friends, you know, and nothing but this fancy."

"Fancy—that's it, nothing more; but look here, Michaud—our old friendship. Take this little play, and when your genius has learnt the principal part bring her to me. There's a rehearsal of it in a week; the actress of this part will be away, and your girl shall fill up the gap. There—now about yourself."

They plunged into old stories, but M. Michaud was not communicative about himself. He went away carrying Georgette's book as if he were loaded with an evil talisman that would work only harm.

"How am I to keep an eye on her if she goes there?" he thought sadly. "Why did Fate throw her in my path? *Sapresti!*"

That night Georgette, who possessed a small room of her own, might have been heard pacing up and down like a caged animal. She learnt that little paper book through, rehearsing it till her brain felt giddy and every pulse beat furiously. What did it matter? By morning she knew it perfectly, and she went off to Madame Bertine, and worked away happily, even though her eyes and head ached. Would

the week never pass—when she could tell Madame that she would make no more bonnets? But if she failed? Why then it would be bonnets for the rest of her life. Quel supplice!

The day came. Georgette was ready long before M. Michaud appeared to accompany her. She walked more like Marie Antoinette going to execution than ever, and felt like her, too. The dream of her life hung on this trial.

But Georgette had never imagined what the reality of this ordeal would be like. The dark theatre, not built to admit pure daylight, the great desolate house, and those rows and rows of empty seats—terrible in their emptiness, making one feel that a myriad of invisible beings were seated there listening, jeering, and criticising, ready at the first trip to hiss you off the stage. Then the gloomy stage itself, and the real flesh-and-blood actors barely visible! But now was heard the prompter's voice, from his mole-like hole, rapping the boards with his wand.

"Allons!"

Suddenly to Georgette it was no longer dark, the ghosts became clothed in ordinary attire, the actors, shadowy though they might be, were not actors but living lords and ladies. And she was not Georgette Joliet, but another woman with a simple, sad pathetic history; a history which would, if people understood it, make them cry from sympathy, and the stage was the world, the world in which the heroine had to live and to suffer.

Georgette walked into the Director's private room after the play as if she were in a dream. She did not notice M. Michaud seated in a corner, she only saw M. Roche whom she had not beheld before, having been ignorant of his presence in one of the boxes. He came forward and patted her on the shoulder.

"Not bad, my child: never done anything of this kind before! Nobody would hear you, you know, beyond the first four rows, and you were all over the stage—but still, practice and hard work may cure that. Would you like to join us? Very little to earn at first, for we shall have all the trouble of training you. Think the question well over."

"I have thought," said Georgette, quietly; "ever since I was a girl."

"Never mind about the pay," put in M. Michaud. "If she can get on?"

"That depends on herself." The Director was guarded. Georgette had gone to fetch her hat.

"Do you recommend her to give it up? It won't do, will it?"

"But it will," answered M. Roche: "and really, Michaud, I think this time it's not only an idea."

"I wish it were," sighed the good man. Nevertheless, as he walked home with Georgette, they turned into Madame's establishment, and Georgette took leave of her for ever. Happy Georgette!

In future she would have to work hard, but not in a crowded room ; not in making coverings for the heads of ladies.

"I owe it all to you," she said once again, looking at M. Michaud with grateful eyes.

"Hush ! child !" but to himself he said : "How on earth am I to keep an eye on her ?" Over and over again he said it, imagining first one way and then another, but only one way persistently occurred to him and this one made him miserable. It was so stupendous a question ; it might frustrate the very thing he wished to bring about ; it might even make Georgette wretched.

Meanwhile he daily went to and from the theatre with Georgette, who soon found out that the stage means more hardship than she had conceived ; weary hours of rehearsal, during which she might have one sentence only to say, sometimes but a word. Still M. Roche was satisfied ; he was training her in his own way, and he found this girl, who had genius, more docile than half his young ladies.

One day a chance word, a little dart sent from an unfriendly bow, suddenly settled M. Michaud's tumultuous thoughts. Much meditation had solved the question, and one fine evening in June he waited for Georgette in the gardens on his favourite seat just below an orange tree in its great ungainly green tub. Georgette was altered even in these few months, she walked down the stone stairs with a firm step, head more erect and a more graceful bearing altogether. All the discontent was gone from her face, for to-day M. Roche had praised her and was going to give her more than a sentence to say before the public.

"Mdlle. Georgette ! You did not see me, eh ? You must have very pleasant thoughts." She smiled, and sat down by him and held out her hand with one of her modest, graceful movements.

"Whenever I am not thinking of my part, I think of how good you have been to me."

"That's nothing, Georgette. I promised your mother to keep an eye on you ; but—may I say a few words ? She did not foresee events, she never imagined this other life for you, my child. A life full of work and grand things, I know, but still a life of danger for one so gifted as you are—yes, Georgette, I must say it—and so beautiful. But Mdlle. Georgette, you do not know the world."

Georgette hung her head ; a rosy hue spread over her face.

"I think of nothing but my work, M. Michaud."

"Of course. But listen, mon enfant, and tell me, will you promise to be my fiancée, and then all the world would know it, and I could keep an eye on you. I am not so young as I should be, Georgette, and I am not handsome ; but still—"

Georgette was crimson now. Her hands trembled, but her words were quiet enough.

"I never thought of such a thing, Monsieur, I dream only of my work. And I am a penniless orphan, not good enough for you, for I

know, in spite of your hiding it, you are not such as I am: only I owe you everything, and can refuse you nothing."

"Don't say anything about my kindness, but tell me of your own free will that at some future time—for I do not wish to interfere with your work—you will be my wife."

"Yes," said Georgette.

"Then we shall feel bound to each other till one of us asks to be released—and the request is granted."

"I could not be so ungrateful, Monsieur—I promise."

"We are quite agreed then?" M. Michaud just raised Georgette's hand to his lips and kissed it; that was the only sign of the compact, and after a short silence they both walked home together. Georgette looked round at the gardens and the signs of young life and happiness which they inspired, and heaved a little sigh. She did not regret her compact, she was even proud to be M. Michaud's fiancée, for she loved him; still, in her girlish day-dreams her lover had not been at all like him, but young and handsome; indeed, just like the hero in "*On ne badine pas avec l'amour*." Well, her day of romance had come and the lover was a middle-aged and decidedly plain man, but his heart was good and true, and as to his kindness—had not she said often she could never repay him—and now that she had found a way, how happy, very happy she ought to be!

Monsieur Michaud spoke of his engagement. He told Madame below, he told everybody, and he took no notice of the smile that now and then was barely hidden. Georgette, too, made no secret of her new happiness, and when some of the theatre people began laughing at her, she flared up and said:

"You could not find in all Paris a man with a better heart," and the answer from a malicious brunette was:

"*Je ne dis pas, chère*, but anyhow you need not go further than the next street to find one handsomer!"

### III.

Time passed swiftly on with Georgette. She almost forgot the episode in the Tuileries, except that M. Michaud usually came to fetch her, and sometimes had a talk with M. Roche about her, always hearing great things of his fiancée. As for M. Michaud himself, he began to get accustomed to the alterations in his daily life, and as changes had come upon him he expressed no great surprise when something else occurred to disturb the former even course of his existence. This was the advent of a young cousin!

Blaise Michaud had made a moderate fortune as a doctor in America, after which he came home to his beloved Paris, bought a practice, and then hunted up the relations whom absence had not made him forget. He was delighted when at last he found Cousin Gustave, but surprised when the latter introduced his fiancée. To

himself he said, "How beautiful she is, and how fortunate my cousin is," then he whistled softly, which with him meant a great deal, and went that evening to see Georgette act: that evening and many others too. There was no harm in looking at his cousin's beautiful fiancée! Besides it was company for Gustave, who night after night went to the theatre to escort Georgette home, instead of being comfortably in bed. What an interest they both took in the pieces played; how quickly they picked up what people said about Georgette, though it was only by degrees that her name began to be mentioned by the public; not till a second winter had come round. It was then Georgette was to take the principal part in a play. M. Roche was more nervous about it than Georgette herself. If she took the fancy of the public now she would have made her fortune, if she failed she must go on again for years, perhaps just a mere nobody, although she and the Director both felt she was somebody!

M. Michaud talked to his fiancée a great deal about her coming trial. He was going to see it of course, and tried to encourage her, for Georgette had been very silent lately; sometimes she did not speak a word to him all the way home, at others she talked excitedly, very unlike her old self. And yet through it all she was the same true, simple, high-minded Georgette.

That eventful evening came at last. There was quite a stir in the corkscrew staircase to see Mdlle. Georgette go off in a carriage, accompanied by M. Michaud. Georgette spoke as she was nearing the theatre.

"After to-night perhaps you will not be proud of me."

"Tut, tut," said M. Michaud. "What the world thinks of you, Georgette, makes no difference to me. You are yourself." She half opened her lips to say something, but at that moment the carriage drew up, and Blaise Michaud was there waiting to hand her out and present her with a big bouquet. "Pour encouragé Mdlle. Georgette," he said. Surely there was no harm in that; it was only a compliment to his cousin's fiancée.

That evening she surpassed herself. She was a success; she was recalled; she was showered with bouquets; her future was assured. M. Michaud, junior, was the only one who did not clap and applaud.

"Eh bien toi, mon cousin," said M. Michaud, "don't you admire Georgette? Doesn't she please thee?"

"Mdlle. Georgette is everything that is perfect; but nevertheless, cousin, do you mean your future wife to be always on the stage? Mine should not be!" M. Michaud looked furtively at the younger man, and made his own reflections.

"There's time yet, and Georgette is happy."

"She doesn't look it," growled Blaise.

"She is given up to her work at present, and has no time to think of love." But Blaise was not convinced.



"A woman has always time to think of love," he said, sulkily.

"Georgette is not like the rest of her sex. I'll tell you what it is, Blaise, she is a pearl among women, she is so true, so good, so altogether unlike most women, that you couldn't find such another if you looked all through Paris."

"I'm not going to try," was the savage answer.

"But then she's poor, and an orphan, no one to look after her interests but myself, you understand, *mon cher*?"

"You make it quite plain to me, Cousin Gustave. *Bon soir.*"

M. Michaud was not at all angry with Blaise for his ill-temper. On the contrary, it seemed to put him in high good humour. He was so tired that night that he overslept himself, and found in the morning that Georgette had gone off to a rehearsal without waiting for him. So he determined to go and meet her in the Tuileries and see how she looked after her triumph.

It was a cold winter's day; now and then the sun burst out brightly in the gardens, trying to cheat the children who were playing about into the belief that it was not winter, and then going suddenly behind a cloud to see them look anxiously with their bright eyes for his coming out again. A regular game of hide-and-seek they had, the children and the sun!

It was in one of these intervals of retirement when a melancholy gloom spread quickly over the gardens, and through the leafless chesnuts, and round the statues, and across the deserted chairs in cafés, that Georgette ran hastily down the stone steps and saw M. Michaud waiting for her. She looked terribly disturbed and not at all like a success, her head, instead of being erect was bent low, slow tears made their way through her heavy eyelids and fell on the fur of her winter jacket; she made straight for the seat, however, and never paused till she reached M. Michaud's side.

"Well, *mon enfant*, what says M. Roche?"

"M. Roche says that I shall do now, he will give me a good salary, and—ah! M. Michaud, I owe it all to you; but—yes, I am a wretch, an ungrateful, cold-hearted wretch, still I have tried, I have fought against it and now I am come to ask you to release me from my promise. You don't know what it costs me to say this, more tears than you can imagine, more hours of misery than I ever knew in my life before; but—I love another. Look, M. Michaud, despise me, but give me back my word."

M. Michaud was almost struck dumb. He looked at Georgette for one instant and knew it was real, knew that whatever she was, Georgette was true, she *did* love another.

"Georgette, is it——"

"No, no; you don't know him; he came to the theatre, he would come. I told him of you, of your goodness, what you had done for me, and—please give me back my word."

"Tell me his name, Georgette."

"Henri Delibes."

M. Michaud started. "What business has he to go behind the scenes? Georgette, do you know he is a Count?"

"Yes. What does that matter? If he were a beggar he would be the same kind——"

"Do you think he will marry you?"

Georgette drew herself up proudly. "Of course he will; but, M. Michaud, do not imagine it is his rank I care for."

"No, Georgette, I know you do not; but, my child, life is not like the stage." M. Michaud's voice was trembling; he was so grieved for Georgette: grieved that he had failed after all to take care of her and protect her; and now it had come to this!

"You are so good," continued Georgette, hurriedly. "My best friend, I know I am asking what I never ought to ask, and yet——"

"Georgette, when I asked you on this very seat to give me your promise, I believed you would be true to it. I said to myself, Georgette is not like other girls, she will say yes, and mean it; she will not think herself free till I release her."

"And you thought rightly, Monsieur. I have done nothing underhand, nothing to be ashamed of. You said we should ask to be released, and I still feel bound by my word and yours."

"And I, Georgette," said M. Michaud, taking off his hat for a moment, as if he were performing a religious duty, "and I, Georgette, before Heaven, I will *not* release you."

That was all they said. Georgette slowly rose from her seat, motioned to M. Michaud not to follow, and walked home alone.

M. Michaud might have sat a long time on the seat, plunged in deep thought, only, curiously enough, his cousin came by almost immediately, and catching sight of him, laughingly warned him that he was courting death in the shape of a bronchite.

"Take a turn with me, mon cousin," continued Blaise. "I want to speak to you. I want to tell you I am going to leave Paris soon."

"I thought you were getting on in your profession?"

"So I am, but there's something better than money or fame—peace of mind; mine will be gone if I stay longer, and to say the truth—don't call me impertinent—it's about Mdlle. Georgette. Do not look so astonished, Gustave, I haven't a thought I would wish to hide, only, of course, she is young and beautiful, and you—well, you have won her, and you are my cousin."

M. Michaud's face was a study at this moment; and the mouth that had been drawn and full of pain relaxed. A smile almost parted his lips, an expression of kindness broke over his face, making its plainness invisible.

"Blaise, give me your hand. You are a noble fellow! You would throw up your appointment rather than win her from me."

"Yes, I would. Not that it is easy; and of course you know you did throw me in her way."

"You haven't told her this?"

"What do you take me for?"

"Forgive me! Only, Blaise, she loves another, not me nor you, but a man I believe to be a scoundrel. Be generous yet further, Blaise; help me to find this out; to unmask him, and Georgette will—I know her—she will herself recoil from him as a dove would from a snake."

Never before had Blaise Michaud had such a struggle with himself. He had so far acted right nobly; but how could he go further, and help to snatch Georgette from one she loved in order that his elderly cousin should keep her for himself? And yet surely this cousin was fond of Georgette and good.

As to Georgette, would she not be happier with the worthy Michaud than with a villain? If she could be saved from such a fate would any sacrifice be too great, even if she never knew to whom she owed her happiness? And Blaise accepted the offer.

"Look here, Gustave, between us, as you say, we can find out this man, show her what her fate would be, and if it is as you think——"

"Then I hope Georgette may still be M. Michaud's fiancée," said the elder man wringing his cousin's hand, "Blaise, mon ami, I am glad you hunted me out when you came to Paris." Blaise murmured an inaudible answer, but it certainly was not "*So am I*." Rather he desired heartily that he had never cast his eyes on Gustave Michaud and Georgette, his fiancée.

The world seemed suddenly convulsed for Georgette when she left M. Michaud's side; but she knew she must try and set her ideas straight before the evening, when she should see Henri Delibes, to give him her final answer. Georgette had promised that, and though she had cried bitterly over the thought of asking for release, yet never for a moment had she believed M. Michaud would say *no*. Now as she hurried along towards home she called him wicked, selfish, cruel; and then again she looked back on his unvarying kindness, his patience, his goodness to her, and she was tortured by her ingratitude.

If she had been like many girls, Georgette would have made very light of her promise; but she was true, and meant to be true, to her word. "Only it will kill me," she murmured in her exaggeration of feeling.

The public expects its entertainment punctually to the hour however unhappy the actors may be; so Georgette drove off to the theatre as usual, not waiting for M. Michaud's escort. There was a small room behind the stage where idlers met their friends, and which was opened to those who claimed acquaintance with the director; it was nearly always empty before the play and full between the acts. Georgette hurried there now, wishing to have the pain over, and knowing *he* would be waiting for her answer.

"I will be true to M. Michaud and to my mother," she murmured as she pushed open the door; and, straightening herself to her full

height, she stood face to face with Henri Delibes. It was quite true what M. Michaud had said. Georgette was young and did not fully understand that life was not like the stage. To her, Henri Delibes had appeared like a very hero of nobility and uprightness; and in this belief she had given him her heart. It is so easy to love at Georgette's age; so easy to believe good of everyone; so impossible to forgive evil; in this very youth was her danger and her safeguard. Even now, though she loved this man so much, she never showed it, because she was so afraid of letting him see it, and so afraid of doing wrong.

"Mdlle. Georgette, I have come to get your answer," he said, looking at her with admiration: but his tone was so quiet, so respectful, that Georgette loved him all the more for it. She clasped her hands very tightly together, and the strange sparkle came into her eyes, as she answered as quietly as he had asked, and very simply.

"M. Michaud will not release me."

"Is that all you have to tell me?" said the Count, in the same low voice. Every movement was graceful, studied, thoroughbred.

"Yes, that is all," said Georgette, trying to steady her voice, and slowly raising her head à la Marie Antoinette. A low laugh escaped the Count; it expressed delicate scorn of Georgette, and involuntarily her cheek flushed.

"Do you mean to say that you intend to be bound by the word of a man old enough to be your father, and wicked enough to spoil your life for his selfish pleasure? Do you mean to say ——"

"No, no; nothing more," broke in Georgette; "for the love of heaven do not ask me more." She moved towards the door.

"What nonsense," said the Count, raising his voice. "Georgette" — it was the first time he had called her so — "look here; tell me you hate me and never wish to see me again, but do not tell me the mere word of *that* man holds you back."

There are people who say that a woman cannot fight against her heart, that the conflict becomes too great for her, that she must fall before the unequal contest; but, happily, truth points to women who can and have done this, and Georgette was one of these. She said to herself that life would, from henceforth, be a burden and a misery; but she never once said "I cannot help myself."

"If you are afraid of him," continued the man before her, "if you fear the reproaches he may heap upon you, or anything else, let me save you from him, Georgette, this very evening ——"

"Pardon, Monsieur le Comte." Georgette blushed crimson as she heard these words, for the voice belonged to Blaise Michaud, who seemed suddenly to have come from another world, and to bring with him a new atmosphere of truth, of strength, and of all that was good, as he gently pushed open the door and made a third at the interview. There was quite a transformation in the Count's face. Georgette had never before seen the look that came into his eyes. It

was a sudden, sweeping expression of hatred and anger, so that unconsciously she moved a few steps from him.

"Mademoiselle is engaged," said the Count haughtily, intimating that outside the door was the best place for Blaise. This latter looked not the least disconcerted at the scornful face of the man before him; he was just the same as usual, simply Blaise Michaud, with nothing tragic or melodramatic about him.

"Mdlle. Georgette and I are old friends," he answered, "and I thought that, as this was a public room, she would like to have a friend at her side in case a man of M. le Comte's well-known character should annoy her. In fact, in case she did not know what I can now tell her: that M. le Comte has a wife—in Auvergne."

Georgette looked up fiercely, ready to defend the man she loved, ready to tell M. Blaise that he was strangely mistaken. She even moved forward as if to protect him; but at that moment she read the truth in his livid and angry face.

At this moment the dressing-bell rang. Georgette had not a moment to lose; she must go, she must act.

"Is this true?" she quickly asked of the Count. She would not go without hearing him say it. Blaise was holding the door for her, but she waited for the answer. It came. A shrug of the shoulders, a smile, the same she had learnt to love, an assumed indifference.

"Let it be. Au revoir—not adieu, Mdlle. Georgette."

Then Georgette knew everything, and she walked out of the room in silent dignity, whilst M. Blaise shut the door for her, and accompanied her as far as her dressing-room. Never had she looked more truly grand than at this moment of supreme self-control, as she dismissed him with, "Merci, M. Blaise," and then she was alone. She did not wish to bemoan herself. She did not faint; on the contrary she was very quiet; she dressed with the same care as usual, only just before she went on the stage she put her hand to her cold forehead, and murmured: "Quel supplice!"

Mdlle. Georgette played better that evening than she had ever done before. Perhaps she had wanted just that touch of real humanity which sorrow, and not joy, can give; perhaps also she was thanking God that even through this fiery ordeal He had kept her safe, for Georgette could no more love evil than she could break her word, and the one ray of comfort she now had in this anguish was that she had conquered self, before knowledge had made it easy.

After the play she found M. Michaud waiting for her, just as usual; she even remembered afterwards that M. Blaise got on the box, as if to take care of her. Now she lay back weary and very quietly. She put her hand into M. Michaud's, and said, like a penitent child:

"Will you forgive me?—and I don't want now to be released."

M. Michaud had been with Blaise in the pit, and between the



acts he had had a long conversation with his cousin, so that he understood Georgette, and wanted no explanation.

"Forgive you, Georgette? Perhaps I ought to be forgiven for saying *no* yesterday. I have thought better of it, *mon enfant*, and now I give you back your word—you are free, Georgette."

Georgette heaved a little sigh of relief. She was glad to be free because she said she meant to be free always now, for she felt such a deep gratitude to M. Michaud she did not wish to give him half a heart.

"You sent M. Blaise," she answered. She should never forget how he had come to her in her need.

"No, no. *Ce pauvre Blaise* went of his own accord. In fact, Georgette, though I ought not to praise my own cousin, yet I must say there is not a better fellow in Paris; I am sure there is not. He was going to leave our town for good, but to-night I persuaded him he had better stay. We cannot spare him, can we, Georgette?"

And Georgette said, "No." She felt that all her life long she would wish to say "*Merci, M. Blaise.*"

That night was the last that saw Mdlle. Georgette on the stage; and, indignant that one whom it had applauded should suddenly disappear, the public took pains to discover the reason. What had she done? why had she left off acting? The truth was so very uninteresting that the public smiled, and said it was only an excuse, when told that Mdlle. Georgette was ill, even dying.

However it was true. Georgette had low fever. A strange doctor, called in to consult with M. Blaise, said it was the result of overwork; as did the chattering Madame, who suddenly turned into a ministering angel on seeing Georgette suffering, and always declared the poor child would have died but for the care and the constant attendance of that clever doctor, M. Blaise Michaud. It was a very long illness, and only by slow degrees did Georgette begin to feel any wish to get well; but after a time she did look forward to M. Blaise's visits, and wondered whether there was such another man in all Paris. Then spring came on and brought sunshine and new life, so that Georgette at last could sit by the open window in Madame's salon and enjoy long chats and long silences with M. Michaud as her companion.

What a fête day it was when Mdlle. Georgette was pronounced quite well again! M. Michaud gave a grand dinner in Madame's room, and sent out a good many invitations to several kind hearts living at various points up and down the corkscrew, who had brought flowers and dainties to Georgette in her illness. No need to say that M. Blaise was invited, or that he overheard Georgette remarking to his cousin:

"I must go back to work now, M. Michaud. I must have used up all my savings with this illness. I should never have got well but for you—and M. Blaise."

"It was all Blaise, mon enfant," he answered, in the fatherly way he had adopted since he had set Georgette free. "I believe he looks upon you as a famous cure. N'est-ce pas, mon cousin?"

Blaise was very bashful, and would take no credit to himself; only when it came to the health-drinking period and the glasses were all ready to be clinked against each other, M. Blaise gave out:

"A la santé de Mademoiselle Georgette!" Then under cover of the general noise he whispered—"Mademoiselle Georgette, do you want very much to go back to the theatre?"

"I *must* go," said Georgette simply, though curiously enough the wish to act had left her since that last night she had appeared. It was not that she could not do it as well as before, but all the golden light that had surrounded it had vanished.

"But suppose, Mademoiselle Georgette, you gave it up, and let me do the bread-winning?" M. Blaise's voice was almost trembling from anxiety and feeling, whilst his cousin, on the contrary, was cracking jokes and making a furious noise with the glasses.

Blaise's tone was so intensely earnest, so true, that Georgette knew all at once that he loved her, and that she returned the love. She understood that on his side at least this was the real thing, and that what she had taken for love before had been but a counterfeit of it. Her silence frightened Blaise. He nodded towards his cousin.

"Do you know, Mademoiselle Georgette, that he wishes it too? He told me to try and win you, otherwise I should not be here. I don't think there is another man like him in all the world."

"Except yourself," said Georgette. "I owe you both everything." She was thinking that her life might have been so different but for them, and then she added, "And I do care for you, M. Blaise."

At this moment there was one of those sudden pauses in the conversation which occur at every dinner-table. Whereupon M. Blaise was seized with a frantic wish to do something, and rising up, glass in hand, he called out:

"Let us drink the health of Monsieur Michaud's fiancée." This was such an old joke that only M. Michaud laughed and winked at Georgette and at Blaise, then returned thanks with great gravity.

What a happy evening that was! No one was angry, except the public and M. Roche; they both felt terribly cheated by that simple-minded genius, Mademoiselle Georgette, who ended by marrying just an ordinary doctor instead of rising to the top of the ladder of Fame. Everybody knows, however, that the feelings of the public are never stirred for more than nine days by one event; and Georgette's happiness would go on till death parted her from Blaise Michaud and from his cousin, who lives with them, and who in making Georgette's happiness has found his own.

## ACROSS EGYPT.

THE traveller who in these days hangs up his hat in his cabin at Colombo, Ceylon, and is not required to take it down again until he arrives at Plymouth or Gravesend, little thinks of the fatigue and worry there was in crossing the Isthmus of Suez before the canal was made.

It is just twenty years ago now since I and a board-ship chum—an officer in a Highland regiment—were landed off the P. and O. Company's ship *Simla*, at Suez, to find our way across the Isthmus at our own sweet will and pleasure. For we had only taken passage as far as Suez, being undecided as to what route we should take afterwards; whether *via* Marseilles, *via* Southampton, or *via* Naples by Italian boat from Alexandria. The old *Simla*, a long narrow vessel, with a strong tendency to roll, was considered a splendid vessel in those days; but the great ships of the present time could almost take her on board as a jolly boat. Nevertheless she was crammed with passengers; who, with the selfishness peculiar to landsmen at sea, hustled one another, struggled, and even fought to be first into the steam tender that was to take us ashore, and, as a consequence, first for choice of rooms in the Suez Hotel, or first for places in the Suez and Cairo railway train. My friend, Mac, was a very cool, cynical Scot, over six feet high, red haired, and brawny. He could have made his way with the best there, but he suggested that we should wait quietly to the last; for, as he sagaciously remarked, "Those who go first will be torn to pieces by the donkey-boys and the beggars, while those who are the last will come in for the additional carriage that is sure to be put on to the train when the others are all crammed to suffocation."

So we waited until the tender had to return for the second and smaller batch of passengers, and then sauntered up to the hotel, which in those days was a sort of compromise between an Eastern caravanserai and a Paris café chantant.

We dined at long tables in the open air, in a kind of courtyard. The sleeping rooms were up above, round the sides of the quadrangle. The courtyard was made green and refreshing to the eye by orange-trees and shrubs in tubs and pots, it being one of the hobbies of all foreigners in Egypt to have as much green about their dwellings as possible. After all, this craving for verdure is very natural, considering the stony, sandy character of the country around, and the blinding glare of the sun in the desert. Along the Suez Canal, in these times, the little gardens at the stations are inexpressibly refreshing; just as much so as the similar collections of flowers and plants which adorn the dusty railway of India.

The food at the hotel was far from good. As a rule the traveller fares badly in Egypt. The subaltern in British Burmah had a lament about the menu at his mess—mutton being a rarity in that country—that

"Whenever it was not ducks and fowls,  
'Twas always fowls and ducks."

And in Egypt a similar complaint might justly be made regarding chickens and eggs.

Chickens—and remarkably tough and leathery ones, too—are the staple food of the country, if we except flies, which take every opportunity of going down after the chickens. Of course, then, we had fowls—and flies. Fowls curried, fowls fricasseed, and fowls pillaoed. That is to say fowls smothered in heaps of rice, raisins, and pistachio nuts; rather worse that way, if possible, than *au naturel*. To compensate for the sameness of this *carte* we had fair claret and good music. The French seem to send the best of their *vin ordinaire* to Egypt for their own drinking: the Egyptians themselves like something stronger. In those days one could get a really decent bottle of wine for one franc, and I was glad to see, when lately at Port Said, that fair claret is still to be had there at a reasonable rate. The music was Maltese, which is saying all that is good of it. The Maltese are the only people in the world who have really good street music, and the vagabond musicians who used to play cornet, fiddles, and double bass to the diners at the Suez Canal would not have disgraced the orchestra of any opera house.

But the bulk of our passengers could neither eat their food, drink their wine, nor listen to the music. They were on pins and needles to be off as soon as they sat down. Their souls were exercised within them to outwit one another in the struggle for seats in the train, in the fight for rooms at Shepheard's Hotel in Cairo; nay, even for berths in the mail steamer waiting for them at Alexandria. Again Mac suggested patience, and amused himself at his fellow-passengers' expense by telling them awful stories of quarantine, and all the modern plagues of Egypt. As he whispered in my ear, "The sooner we get them away to Cairo the better for ourselves;" and no doubt his dismal anticipations, recounted with a long face that never smiled, hastened many on their way westwards. A lot went away by train in the roasting mid-day sun, leaving the hotel for us half empty. And Mac, as he noted this exodus, concluded to remain at the hotel all the night.

There is not much to be done at Suez. It is a deadly lively place. Simpletons go ten miles down the coast to see some puddles that go by the name of Moses' Wells. They sometimes get sun-stroke for their pains; they always use very bad language when they return. Pedants dispute as to the exact place the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, which sea ends in a *cul de sac* here. And they generally fall out, what with the argument, the heat, and the flies.

Wise men follow the example of the Turks in such circumstances, and give themselves up to "Kiëff" and tobacco. There is fishing, for those who like fishing under a broiling sun, at Suez. A fine large fish called the Red Sea salmon is abundant, and will give good sport if trawled for from a boat after the manner adopted on the Scotch and American lakes.

But the night at Suez is the most wearisome of all times there. It is too hot to sleep, and it is too stupid to stay awake. What then is to be done?

"Let us go and see a gambling house," said Mac. "Egypt is infamous for Greeks in more senses than one."

So we strolled out in the bright moonlight, cigars in mouth, and heavy sticks in hand, mindful of the indigenous curs that snarl and bay near the dingy street corners. It was only ten o'clock, yet the streets were deserted, except for a stray figure in white that flitted across from one side of the road to the other now and then. Our guide, one of the dragomen of the hotel, was a villainous looking specimen, but to do him justice, he endeavoured to dissuade us from satisfying our curiosity regarding a Suez gambling den. Possibly his own experiences of such places were far from pleasant: at all events, he gave us to understand that knives were freely used there. A tragedy enacted at Suez, a few years later, justified his warning. A captain of an English Lancer regiment, who entered one of these Suez gambling houses out of curiosity, was stabbed by a Greek, and killed on the spot.

The place to which we were taken reminded me of the opium-smoking dens which are one of the sights of the island of Singapore. The room was just as oriental, and just as revolting as John Chinaman's favourite haunt of vice; but it was better lit up with a tawdry French crystal lustre. The game played was some kind of roulette, and round the table were some twenty or thirty men of all nations, but chiefly Arabs and Greeks. Most of them smoked, and the atmosphere was exceedingly dense in consequence. There was little noise, and indeed little to see except the eyes of the Arabs, which literally blazed—magnificent coal-black eyes they were—when they clawed up their gains with their long brown fingers. One or two seemed to regard our entrance with disfavour, but after a few words with the dragoman, and a mental calculation perhaps of Mac's thews and sinews, we were left at peace. However, not knowing the language used, and finding the air oppressive, we soon departed, and were allowed to leave without hindrance.

The railway journey across Egypt, whatever it may be now, used to be one of the most tedious in the world. The dead level of the desert, the glare, the heat, the flies, were all bad enough; but to enhance still further the discomforts of the train, the Turkish railway officials used to stop the engine when they pleased—often only for the sake of a little conversation. There was one terrible



spot in the midst of the desert where the train was delayed a long time, in order to give the irritable and irritated Indian passengers an opportunity of eating stale refreshments. Such a place! A kind of wooden booth in a stony waste, where Mugby Junction sandwiches were sold for a shilling each, and a bottle of ale for one rupee.

However, the longest journey has an end at last: though when we got to Cairo, and to Shepherd's Hotel, in the evening, our troubles were by no means over. Here we first heard the news that the Nile had washed away the railway bridge between Cairo and Alexandria; consequently it was impossible to proceed to the latter place by rail. A steamer was to be provided next day by the Pasha's government—there was no Khedive in those days—to take us down the river, and the Mahmoudieh Canal to Alexandria, and my friend Mac's face was a study as he saw Shepherd's Hotel crammed from garret to basement with the crowd of passengers he had flattered himself were far ahead of him by this time. There was a rueful re-union between the whilom friends (?) of the good ship *Simla* who had parted, as they fondly hoped, never to meet again, and the Highland blood of my guide, philosopher and friend, mantled in his freckled cheeks, as he reflected how beautifully he had been "done" by sending these people on in front of him to engage, for themselves, all the best rooms in the hotel! In effect, Mac and I had to sleep on a table in the dining-room, over which a charitable Egyptian rigged mosquito curtains.

To beguile the hours, and to escape the quarrelling and complaining of our fellow travellers, and the screams of the babies that accompanied some of them, we strolled out to see Cairo. In those times it was possible to buy really good Latakiah tobacco in the Egyptian capital, so we provided ourselves with two goatskins' full, and with cherry-stick chibouques about six feet long. We also visited the mosque, which is really worth seeing, and the Pasha's palace, a marvel of extravagant upholstery and bad taste. And from the Citadel we looked down upon a troop of our fellow passengers on donkey-back, wending their way to the Pyramids with that restlessness for sight-seeing so characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon abroad. But the best time in Cairo was at night, when the band played in the illuminated gardens in front of the Hotel, and all Cairo turned out to make a promenade under the trees, or to eat ices and drink coffee at the little tables scattered, boulevard fashion, all about. I have heard that this garden had to be suppressed later, on account of its immorality, but I saw nothing of an immoral character there at the time of our visit: on the contrary, the people, promenading or sitting at the tables, seemed to be enjoying themselves in a very sober and orderly manner.

Next morning, after a sleepless night, we were all, to the number of about two hundred souls, bundled on board a Nile steamer

calculated to hold only half that number, and were kicked to sea, as the sailors say, in half a gale of wind. The Nile, then in full flood, was indeed a sea to look at. Its turbid brown waters, lashed by the wind into muddy waves, rolled as far as the eye could see in the distance, and our little ship heaved and swayed in such an alarming manner that we expected it every now and then to turn turtle. Engines and all were completely under the control of Turks, and this fact did not add to the comfort of the Europeans on board. The Qui hys of Calcutta ceased their eternal grumblings and stared apprehensively at the surrounding flood; the "Ducks" of Bombay did not behave as ducks might be expected to do under such circumstances, but regarded the water with horror. The grass widows and flirts of the Red Sea postponed their wiles, their coquetries and their killing glances, to a better season, and cowered down on deck, saying, let us hope, their prayers.

But the horrors of this alarming voyage culminated when we got into the lock at the place where the Nile has been dammed across from bank to bank below Cairo. Here the river rushed down like a sluice, and our Egyptian captain, standing on the paddle-box, seemed completely to lose his head, as he actually lost his long pipe. We had a narrow squeak of a complete smash up; a critical moment, of which friend Mac took occasion to admonish the company in sepulchral tones, "I told you so," and then we shot out of the lock into the broad river like an arrow from a bow, and after that had, comparatively, better sailing.

By noonday, indeed, the wind had gone down, and the boat had steadied sufficiently to allow us to do justice to the capital luncheon the Government, or the Company, had provided for us. Under the grateful awning on deck we devoured ham and chicken, drank cool claret, and forgot half our troubles for a season. Some of the flirts even attempted to make romance out of the muddy Nile and the distant palm-trees on its equally muddy banks, but that would not do. From Cairo down to the entrance of the Mahmoudieh Canal, the river Nile is about the most uninteresting stream imaginable.

The Mahmoudieh Canal is, however, worse. This abominable ditch, with banks so high that one cannot see over them, offers the very worst of all travelling. The ghosts of the myriads of fellaheen whom Mehemet Ali slew in constructing it, seem to revenge themselves in this way on the innocent traveller. And never shall I forget the long weary hours, as day passed to evening, and evening to night, and we still puffed and laboured along with asthmatic engines through that dismal ditch.

To add to our impatience we were continually fouling, or having to stop to let pass, those gracefully-winged Nile sailing vessels familiar to everyone in pictures. And as hour after hour passed, and Alexandria seemed as far off as ever, the ladies of our party sank down on the deck in despair, and the children cried themselves, one

by one, to sleep. We had an Anglo-Indian on board whose nose was plainly coloured by the rosy god. He drank steadily all day from a bottle of brandy, which he carried in a leather case, and which to the uninitiated looked like a telescope. About 10 p.m. he fell overboard, and we picked him up in the starlight. The rest were too weary and listless to care much whether he was drowned or not. The two hundred lay, packed head and foot together, on the little deck, wishing for an end to their misery that came not. They groanfully regretted the luxuries of the old long sea route to India round the Cape, and the greatest flirt on board was so snappish that not one of the gentlemen in her train dared speak to her.

About midnight we arrived at Alexandria, cross and weary, when the struggle for quarters had all to be gone over again. The Grand Hotel in the square—where they used to charge the traveller a pound a day for the most villainous cuisine of the Mediterranean—was quite full of outward and homeward bound passengers, so canny Mac left the company to quarrel and fight about rooms, while we two slipped away to the harbour, and after some difficulty got a boatman to take us on board the old *Indus*, the Southampton boat, the first officer of which vessel was a friend of my companion. We slept comfortably on board, free from mosquitoes, and worse; and next day had the melancholy satisfaction of seeing some of our late fellow-passengers come trooping off to the steamer with frowsy hair, half-washed faces, and all the tokens on their persons of a bad night, followed by an incomplete toilette in an Egyptian hotel.

Before this, at sunrise, my friend Mac, who knew all the ropes, took me off in a boat for a swim in the Pasha's bath. Judging from the many baths in his palaces at Cairo and Alexandria, Said must have been a very clean monarch, if not an amphibious potentate altogether. But it is to be feared that in his case cleanliness was not allied with godliness. There were many scandals current of the Pharoah of the period; among other things, how he used to throw the ladies of his harem into these baths, and wickedly enjoy the splashing, kicking, and screaming that always followed. His marble baths in the Cairo palace were superb, but his salt water swimming bath in the harbour of Alexandria was even better.

In appearance this delightful bath was like a mosque built out in the middle of the sea. One entered by a flight of stone steps at which the boat was left moored, and after climbing the steps we found ourselves in a spacious quadrangle of coloured tiles; overhead, a handsome oriental domed roof. A venerable Mussulman, the guardian of the bath, affected the utmost indignation at our impudence at even coming to such a place, much more at our dreaming of bathing there! Why the Pasha himself might come at any moment, or the ladies of the harem, and then our infidel heads would pay the penalty of our unparalleled audacity! Mac, who knew the ways of the Egyptians, let the old fellow run on until he was tired and scant

of breath. Then he produced half-a-crown, and quietly mentioned, what was the fact, that Said Pasha was away at some one of his palaces on the Nile, and that the probability—which he, Mac, greatly regretted—was, that the ladies of the harem were away with him.

On this, Cerberus moderated his truculent tone; and after some more conversation allowed us to enter the bath in consideration of another half-crown from myself. We had a most delightful swim in water of a perfect temperature. The bath was so built that it was really a bit of sea roofed in, and luxuriously arranged with dressing-rooms all round. Only the rascally old guardian of the place *would* persist in frightening us with fearful anticipations of what must follow should any of the Pasha's household come off and catch us there. He was condescending enough, nevertheless, to produce two of the Pasha's towels for our use, and on our threatening to throw him into the bath in case of refusal, he even unlocked one or two of the dressing-room doors to satisfy our curiosity. To tell the truth, the Pasha's naiades seemed easily satisfied. The retiring rooms were of the very simplest description, and I noticed a broken shilling-looking-glass on the wall of one of them. Cerberus was evidently much relieved when we left him, and got into our boat again to pull back to the ship. Perhaps it was really a serious piece of pleasure to bathe in the Pasha's private bath; but baksheesh will do anything with the Egyptians: for a sovereign one might sleep in the Pasha's palace.

On board, we heard of the adventures of two of our fellow passengers, who were foolish enough to wander about the back streets of Alexandria the night before. They had entered a third-class café with the idea of getting a lobster salad, when they were set upon by some rascally Greeks, who attempted to stab and rob them. Luckily, some English sailors were passing the house at the time and heard the row. If they had not come to the rescue promptly it might have fared badly with our friends. But in those days Egypt was a land of adventures for anyone who lagged at all behind the ruck of passengers that were dispatched like so many parcels from sea to sea. Very different, is it, now that the Suez Canal affords no opportunity for shore going, except at Port Said, and then only if the canal is so blocked as to necessitate the delay of an hour or two to enable the steamer one sails in to take her turn.

What it will be in the future when Egypt's present troubles have passed away to give place to a higher order of things—or to a lower—who can tell?

F. E. W.



## A STRANGE COINCIDENCE.\*

IT happened, three or four years ago, that a young English lady in leaving the boat at Lucerne met with what at the moment appeared to be a very trifling accident. She slipped and fell; and in falling struck her head against the bulwark of the boat. Her mother, who was close by and had seen the blow, was alarmed by it and asked her daughter if she had hurt her head.

"No, mamma," the girl answered; "nothing to signify; but I have hurt my foot. I don't think I can stand."

By this time she had been helped out of the stream of passengers, which was pouring from the boat to the shore, and placed on one of the deck seats. Even this movement had given her so much pain that there was clearly a bad sprain, if not a fracture, to be apprehended, and father, mother, and sister were standing round the sufferer in considerable perplexity and dismay.

Suddenly the girl broke into a half-merry, half-rueful laugh. "Don't look so miserable, please," she said. "I suppose I must get to the hotel somehow, and the sooner the better, but I doubt very much whether I can stand. Papa, do you think I could be carried on shore?"

Two gentlemen, the last of the passengers, had been standing at a short distance from the family group until this moment. When the girl spoke the elder of the two made a step forward with a remonstrative, "Well, I suppose I must, but it's a horrid bore!" and then, with a rapid change of tone and a courteous raising of his hat, addressed the mother.

"I am a doctor—can I be of any service to you?"

The poor lady turned round with a wonderfully relieved countenance. "Oh, thank you!" she said. "How very fortunate! What a comfort to see an English doctor! If you *could* tell us how much she is hurt?"

"Not very much, I hope," he answered and proceeded to feel the girl's foot and ankle gently. She winced a little, but smiled and thanked him prettily.

"It is a slight sprain," he said, "which must be strapped and kept still for a few days. She had better be taken to your hotel. If you have a carriage ready I will carry her to it at once, so that she may be made comfortable. The less delay in these cases the better."

In another minute he had picked her up (she was not a very heavy weight, certainly) and had put her—"hardly hurting her at all," she laughingly said to him—into the carriage which was to take her to the

\* The author vouches for the truth of this incident.



Schweizerhof. Her mother and sister went with her—her father was for the moment absorbed in the care of luggage—and the doctor, with his fellow-traveller, walked briskly along the sunny street after the invalid and her companions.

Mr. Garston, the English surgeon who had so opportunely come to the relief of his countrywoman in distress, was by no means a knight-errant, nor was he at all pleased by the unexpected call made on his time and services. He had just begun to enjoy a long-desired and hard-earned holiday, and had come to Switzerland resolved to conceal his profession and avoid his compatriots. Even when the accident happened before his eyes he had only waited to assure himself that no danger to life had apparently arisen before he said to his brother: "Now we will keep out of their way—there are plenty of other people to help them," and he had been rather annoyed at being answered: "All the same, I think if I were you I should see that the sprain was properly attended to."

When the girl, whose very lips were white with pain, had said those few laughing words as he put her into the carriage, his disinclination to help her had partly melted. "She does not make an unnecessary fuss," he said to himself; and although he still grumbled at his brother's remark, he offered himself as a victim to circumstances. He and his brother were going to stay a few days at the Schweizerhof, and as they walked thither, he felt that after all it would have been brutal to refuse his aid in a case where it could be given with so little trouble, and might alleviate much suffering.

Before the end of the day, tolerably friendly relations had been established between the Garstons and the family of the elder Mr. Garston's patient. The head of this family was Mr. Sterling, a Scotchman long established in Manchester, and very wealthy. His wife was a kind, simple woman, who was not yet quite sure whether, for her own part, she liked the grandeur of her later days one bit better than the comparative poverty of her earlier ones, but who certainly did like her pretty daughters to have "everything of the best," and their own wills in *almost* everything. The girls were both pretty and good; and that one of them, at least, possessed a considerable amount of courage and self-control. Mr. Garston could have testified after he had strapped up and bandaged her poor swollen ankle, and told her that for a good many days to come she would have to limit her acquaintance with beautiful Lucerne to as much of it as could be seen from her couch and a window.

Nor was his opinion shaken even when, quite early the next morning, Mr. Sterling came to his room and begged he would have the goodness to visit Minnie as soon as possible, as she had had a restless night and much alarmed her mother. He obeyed the call directly, and was shocked to find the girl half delirious, moaning now and then, "My head! my head!" and in a high fever. It was evident that the blow on her head, regarded as of no consequence at the time,

had been really the more serious injury of the two, and Mr. Garston at once found all his care and skill called upon to avert very serious consequences.

This care and skill, however, were not small, nor were they grudgingly used, and with the tender nursing of mother and sister, they succeeded bye-and-bye in bringing all danger to an end. For some days Mr. Garston made himself almost a prisoner; then, as cause for anxiety diminished, he ventured to go with his brother on various short expeditions; and presently things reached a stage at which he saw his patient in the morning, and then felt himself at liberty (so far as she was concerned) to be absent until the same hour on the following day. Mr. Sterling joined in some of these excursions; two or three times his youngest daughter Emmie (the Sterlings were great in diminutives) was of the party; and the Sterlings' sitting-room was always open to the brothers in the evening. Thus a considerable degree of intimacy grew up before Minnie was able to leave her room.

It was in the very end of her imprisonment that a curious incident occurred.

One evening, after the two brothers had been absent all day, and when they had come back to the hotel unusually tired, Mr. Garston refused to drop in for the customary cup of tea in the Sterlings' sitting-room. He would smoke a cigar, he said, and go to bed early. The heat of the day had made his head ache, and he was not bright enough to care for talk. So he was left alone, and before ten o'clock went to bed.

He had taken a book with him, which at first interested him a good deal. He had no premonitory feeling of drowsiness to warn him to put out his light, but he probably did fall asleep—as we sometimes do—quite abruptly. At any rate, waking or asleep, his attention was roused by the opening of his door, and the entrance of a man into his still-lighted bed-room. The intruder appeared to be about his own age—thirty; he was rather good-looking, tall, and well-made, with blue eyes and a quantity of wavy or curly brown hair. He was in a brown knickerbocker suit—a very prominent brown, not at all likely to be mistaken for any other colour; and he was carrying something, not clearly distinguishable, in his hand. He walked composedly into the middle of the room, looked steadily at its startled occupant, and then, without having spoken a word, turned round and walked out again.

Mr. Garston, astonished at this midnight visitation, and annoyed with himself for not having spoken to the intruder, which he had seemed unable to do, quickly jumped out of bed, threw on a dressing-gown, and hurried to the door. Bright moonlight was filling the corridor, and he could see the stranger going deliberately towards the staircase. Of course the natural conclusion was that he was some belated guest, who had missed the way to his own room; but against this theory

there was some mysterious feeling of "uncanniness" in the whole proceeding that seemed to compel Mr. Garston to follow and see whither the unknown would go. This curious feeling increased as the man, his noticeable dress fully lighted up from time to time by an inflowing stream of moonlight, went on, leaving the storey on which were the rooms occupied by the two brothers, and descending to the corridor partly occupied by the Sterlings. They had five rooms, and the middle one of these was that occupied by Minnie.

She was now so far recovered as to be left alone at night, her sister's room adjoining and opening into hers. Mr. Garston was, of course, acquainted with these arrangements, and it was with an increase of surprise and curiosity that he now saw his mysterious visitor pause at Minnie Sterling's door, then open it quietly and walk in. The young man followed. The stranger approached the bedside where the girl lay calmly sleeping, undisturbed by the invasion of her room. He paused for a minute, then raised his arm, and with one strong, steady stroke plunged a long knife into the sleeper's breast!

There was a moment in which the horrified bystander saw nothing; then his vision steadied, and he perceived that the murderer was gone, that the sleeper still lay before him, but that sleep had passed into death without a cry, without a struggle. And then he was conscious of a strange numbness of all his faculties, which made it seem impossible to speak, or act, or even think. It did not occur to him to give any alarm, or in any way make known what had happened. He turned away and left the room, and got back to his own without shaking off this numbness in the least; and so, from a kind of horrible mental haze, he fell into a deep but troubled sleep.

He woke in the morning later than usual, and as he woke the fearful experience of the night returned to his memory. At first he thought it had been a dream; then every detail came to his recollection with such perfect clearness that he assured himself it was not so; and then came a dread of being summoned by the Sterlings, as he certainly would be the moment the tragedy was discovered.

He sprang up and dressed. The hotel was already awake and astir, and he wondered the murder had not yet been made known to fill the cheerful house with horror and dismay. Every moment he expected some cry of distress, some hurried footstep rushing to tell him the fatal news; but all was quiet, or, rather, all was noisy with the usual sounds of coming and going, in that great caravanserai.

At last he could endure suspense no longer. He went downstairs, and, though it was far before the hour of his daily visit, he approached with indescribable anxiety the door of the Sterlings' sitting-room. Just as he did so it opened, and Mr. Sterling came out.

"Ah, Mr. Garston," he exclaimed, in his cheery voice and homely Northern accent; "well met! My wife was just sending me to ask you to speak to her before breakfast."

What could it mean? The young man followed the elder into

the room in the strangest confusion of mind. Mrs. Sterling was there, fresh and cheerful as the morning.

"Minnie won't rest, Mr. Garston," she said, "unless I ask your leave for her to go out a little this morning. Early, she says, before the sun gets too hot. I told her it would be time enough to ask you when you came to see her; but she is spoiled, you know. We must humour her a little."

Minnie! then she was not dead? Was it a dream? It was not a truth, at any rate—for she was there; weak certainly, but bright and eager to be in the fresh air. And from that day she was allowed to move about and enjoy herself by progressive steps more and more, until, when the Sterlings left Lucerne, there was scarcely a trace of her illness left.

They were all very grateful to Mr. Garston for his care of the girl, and several times during the last days they spent together he was on the point of telling them the singular vision he had had, which he now believed to have been simply a strange and horrible dream. But a repugnance to awaken in them anything of the sensations he had suffered made him keep silence, and they parted without a word having been said on the subject.

The Garstons left Lucerne first. They were going to prolong their tour for several weeks, while the Sterlings were going leisurely homewards. Warm expressions of regard and invitations were exchanged when the brothers were departing, and there, for a time, all intercourse ceased.

More than two months after the parting at Lucerne Mr. Garston, who had left his brother behind him in Paris, arrived at Victoria Station by the Continental train. The station seemed to be fuller and busier than usual, so, having rescued his portmanteau from the hurly-burly, he decided to carry it himself into the open yard in front of the station, and then get a hansom to convey it and himself home. But as he emerged from the station on to the long line of pavement running from end to end of it in front of its many entrances, he saw, coming towards him, a man whom he instantly recognised. There could not be a shadow of doubt about it. There were the thick, curly brown hair, the singularly bright blue eyes, the tall well-knit figure, and the very costume, with its noticeable tint and material—all exactly as he had seen them. It was the man of his vision at Lucerne!

Whoever or whatever he might be, he was now walking unconcernedly out of Victoria Station, carrying a travelling bag in his hand and evidently looking for a cab. In a minute he hailed one, and got into it. The crowd was at one of its moments of crisis, and it was impossible to move otherwise than slowly. Mr. Garston determined to see whither he went. A hansom drew up close by him.

"Do you see that cab?" he said, pointing out the one. "Follow it wherever it goes, and be sure do not lose sight of it."

He sprang in. The cabman manœuvred so cleverly that he followed the unknown closely out of the yard ; and then a long chase began.

Through street after street, round corner after corner they went, sometimes separated, but never far apart or out of sight, until at last the journey ended at the door of a house in Regent's Park. The unknown alighted, rang the bell, and paid the cabman. It was evident that he meant to stop at this house ; was probably at home there.

Mr. Garston hesitated what to do ; but the sight of the man in the full light of day, and in London, was so linked with the recollection of him as he plunged his long knife into Minnie Sterling's heart, that it seemed impossible to let him go without some certainty about him. After all, he could plead a misdirection—a mistake. To penetrate into that house, to clear up the mystery of this identity, had become an imperious necessity.

As the stranger entered the door with the air of one familiar and expected, Mr. Garston jumped from his cab and followed him. An astonished footman suffered the second visitor to pass ; he pursued the man upstairs, saw him open a door, and heard exclamations of welcome. Almost too quickly to recognise the voices, he had also entered, and found himself in the presence of the Sterlings !

He thought afterwards how fortunate it was that, in their warm welcome, they forgot to be very exacting in the matter of explanations. They took it for granted he had somehow learned that they were living in this "furnished house" for a few weeks to make preparations for Minnie's wedding, and they only said "How lucky he had not gone to Manchester to look for them !" But when Minnie came to him and said shyly that Fred did so want to thank him for all his kindness to her at Lucerne, and he felt himself compelled to shake hands with the man of his vision, so strong a horror thrilled all through his frame that the remembered horror of his dream was as nothing to it.

Minnie has been for some time the wife of the dream-murderer. What the end of this true story will be no one knows.





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## POSSIBILITIES.

If one should wake one's frozen faith

In sunlight of her radiant eyes,

Bid it forget its dream of death

In this new dream of Paradise ;

Bid it forget the long, slow pain,

The agony, when, all in vain,

It fought for life, and how one swore,

Once cold, it should not waken more :

If hope one buried long ago

Should thrill beneath those smiles of hers,

Should in one's sere life stir and grow,

As in brown woods the young spring stirs ;

If, breaking icy bonds of grief,

One's soul should start to bud and leaf,

One might forget in that Springtide,

How last year's leaves fell off and died.

If from warm faith and hope set high

A lovely living child were born,

With lips more pure than starlit sky,

And eyes as clear as summer dawn ;

Child-love might grow till one forgot

Old love, that was and now is not ;

Forget that far-off time of tears,

And all these desolated years.

How vain to question ! Ah, *one* knows

Faith is alive and hope awake—

And love has stirred beneath Time's snows,

And sprung to life for her sweet sake.

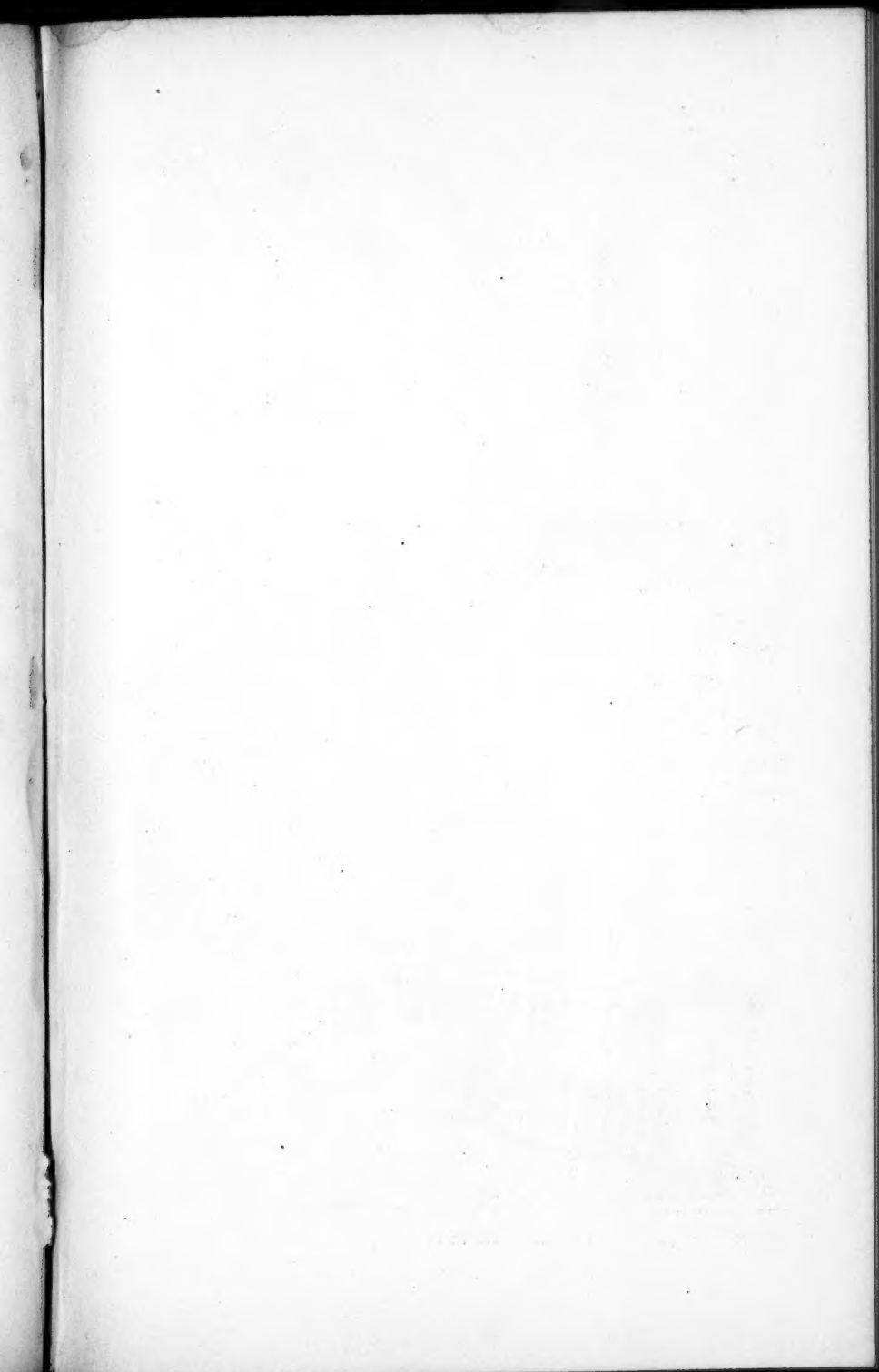
She only can divine and see

What future lies before those three,

Since all their chance hangs on her breath,

Her "Yes" or "No"—their life or death.

E. NESBIT.





M. ELLEN STAPLES.

H. AND E. TAYLOR.

"YOU READ THESE LETTERS, BEN?"